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THE  
CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO  
OTHER RELIGIONS

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## PREFACE

This volume contains the Hulsean Lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge in 1949. Substantially, they are now printed as they were delivered, but some passages which were then omitted for lack of time are here included. Also a few verbal alterations have been made, and some additional references added, mostly in the notes. For these, the sanction of the Chairman of the Faculty Board of Divinity has been obtained, as required by the regulations of the University.

These Lectures, together with some earlier writings of mine, were approved in 1950 by the University of Cambridge as a qualification for the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

No attempt is made here to undertake a comprehensive study of non-Christian religions. That would demand a range of scholarship greater than I can make any claim to possess. My aim has been a more limited one—to inquire what has been, and what should be, the attitude of the Church and of individual Christians towards religions other than their own, and to review the policy and methods of Christian Missions to non-Christians. Incidentally, this has involved some consideration of the tenets and practices of other religions, but not an exhaustive study of these, nor a detailed comparison of them with those of the Christian Church. In so far as I have any qualifications for dealing with the theme selected, these rest upon a fairly extensive practical acquaintance with adherents of other faiths—particularly Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists—during a residence of 26 years in India and Ceylon, rather than on a scholar's knowledge of the sacred books of other religions in their original tongues.

In 1948, I published through the Canterbury Press a small book on a kindred subject, entitled *The Gospel and Other Faiths*. While the present work is on a larger scale and on a different plan, it has been almost inevitable that many of the lines of argument, and some of the illustrative passages quoted here, should contain a good deal of repetition from the earlier book. I would express my thanks to the Canterbury Press for their courtesy in raising no objection to this; and I hope that some readers who desire a simpler treatment of the subject may find what they need in the smaller book.

## PREFACE

The friends—both European and Oriental—who have helped me in the preparation of these lectures have been so numerous that I must forbear to enumerate them individually. There are, however, two to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude. Dr Charles E. Raven, as Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, gave me constant advice, encouragement, and friendship; and I have also been blessed with that best of helpers for a scholar, a discerning and sympathetic wife.

*Great Shelford,  
Cambridge*

1952

E. C. DEWICK

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout these lectures:

Hastings *D.B.*—Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*. (Edinburgh, 1898—.)

Hastings *E.R.E.*—Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. (Edinburgh, 1908—.)

*I.R.M.*—*International Review of Missions*.

Latourette, *H.E.C.*—K. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. (London, 1938—.)

Kraemer, *The Christian Message*—H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. (London, 1938.)

*Amsterdam Series*, 1948—The Series of Reports of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, at Amsterdam, 1948. (4 vols., London, 1948.)

*D.N.B.*—*Dictionary of National Biography*. (London, 1885—.)

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose for which the Hulsean Lectures were founded is set forth by the Founder, the Reverend John Hulse, in his Will, dated 21 July 1777. The Lecturer is to be 'a learned and ingenious clergyman'; he is enjoined 'to show the evidence for Revealed Religion', and 'to answer all popular cavils' against Christianity. He is not to indulge in polemical controversies against other Christians, unless some peculiarly dangerous heresy threatens the Church—such as (says Mr Hulse) 'the superstition of Popery, or the enthusiasm of Methodism'.<sup>1</sup>

A strict adherence to these instructions is somewhat difficult under the changed conditions of today. Yet I trust that in selecting 'The Christian Attitude to Other Religions' as the theme of these lectures, I have in substance fulfilled the intention of the Founder. For among the many challenges which the Church has to meet today, few require more serious consideration than those which come from the non-Christian religious systems and movements of our time. I would not, indeed, suggest that these should be classed as being (to use Mr Hulse's term) mere 'popular cavils'; though assuredly they are 'popular', and call for a clear answer from the side of the Church. How many of these systems can be correctly styled 'non-Christian *religions*' may be open to question; for the word 'Religion' is capable of so many interpretations that some have declared it to be 'indefinable'.<sup>2</sup> If, however, a definition is desired, we might adopt the suggestion of a former Hulsean Lecturer, Dr A. C. Bouquet, who in his 'Pelican' book on *Comparative Religion*, defines Religion as 'a fixed relationship

<sup>1</sup> See *The Historical Register of the University of Cambridge*, ed. J. R. Tanner (1917), p. 160; cf. p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. A. B. Widgery, in his *Comparative Study of Religions* (London, 1933), after quoting eight different definitions of 'religion' by eminent scholars, comes to this conclusion (pp. 2 ff.). So does Prof. C. C. J. Webb, in his *Group Theories of Religion* (London, 1916); though at the same time he maintains that we all know what we mean by 'religion' (p. 59).

## INTRODUCTION

between the human self and some non-human entity' (p. 13). This will cover, not only the ancient and modern religious systems outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but also some movements of thought today which, though professedly non-religious, or even anti-religious, display many of the characteristics of religion. It is indeed from movements of this kind that Christianity today has to meet its most immediately formidable challenge. We will therefore begin our study by considering some of these 'political religions'.

LECTURE I

THE CHALLENGE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS  
TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO-DAY



## LECTURE I

# THE CHALLENGE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO-DAY

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### THE CHALLENGE FROM THE 'POLITICAL RELIGIONS'

At the present moment, the most dynamic forces in human society are undoubtedly to be found in movements that are primarily political rather than religious. Communism, Nazism, Fascism, Nationalism, and (at any rate till recently) Imperialism have shown themselves able to stir the hearts and wills of men to an extent that no purely religious movement in recent years has done, calling them to surrender and arousing them to service and self-sacrifice, with a power unequalled in any other sphere of human life.

#### *The religious note in modern political movements*

These movements are often vehemently opposed to one another, and in many cases hostile to all existing religious organizations. But even when their denunciations of religion in any form are most violent, their spirit and their methods are more akin to those of religion than to those of science. They have (as Dr Hendrik Kraemer has said) 'all the paraphernalia of religion'.<sup>1</sup> They bring to their devotees the conviction that they are in contact with mysterious unseen powers; they speak with a note of divine (some would say 'demonic') authority; they disdain arguments based on scientific study; they make their appeal not to man's reason, but to his emotions; and they achieve power largely by a skilful appeal of 'suggestion' to the psychology of the crowd.

(i) *Communism.* At the moment, Marxist Communism is apparently the most dynamic of all such movements; and in

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 15.

it Christianity has to meet its most formidable rival—a rival, moreover, in the sphere of religion. Most of us will probably dismiss as extravagant the affirmation of one of its admirers that it is 'the one living religion in the Western world today',<sup>1</sup> and may perhaps suspect that the pictures of Communism drawn by the present Dean of Canterbury have been seen by him through somewhat rose-coloured spectacles.<sup>2</sup> But that Communism, in spite of all its professions of atheism, can be rightly understood and interpreted only when it is treated *as a religion*, is now widely recognized. The late Nicholas Berdyaev—a Christian philosopher with an 'inside knowledge' of Communism—constantly emphasized that the religious element is fundamental, both in Communism and in its predecessors, Nihilism and Anarchism. He pointed out that the vehement hostility shown by Communism towards all other religions (and particularly to any form of religion, such as Christian Socialism, which shares some of its own political ideals) is due to the fact that 'it wants to be a religion itself'.<sup>3</sup> 'It is built', he says, 'after the pattern of the Catholic and Orthodox theocracies, but the pattern is reversed'.<sup>4</sup> The religious aspect of Communism has also been forcefully set forth by Harold Laski. Of Stalin and his associates, he says:

We are dealing with men who have a conviction that is religious in its profundity. They have a 'vision' of its character. They are convinced that it is infinitely precious. They believe that no sacrifices are too great for its attainment. . . . They believe that the only sin is weakness, that error is as profound a threat to victory as was heresy to the Christian of an earlier age. Their effort has for them all the elements of a crusade. . . . The Bolshevik, not less than the Puritan, is guided by his Inner Light. . . . The Bolshevik reliance upon their texts from Marx and Lenin and Stalin is identical with the Puritan dependence upon citations from the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Middleton Murry, *The Necessity of Communism* (London, 1932), p. 111. M. Wight, a Christian writer in the *Ecumenical Review*, no. 1 (1948), says: 'Communism has a worldwide evangel' (p. 282).

<sup>2</sup> See Dr Hewlett Johnson's trilogy, (1) *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (1939); (2) *Soviet Strength* (1942); and (3) *Soviet Success* (1947).

<sup>3</sup> *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London, 1937), p. 191; cf. pp. 48, 177. Cf. B. H. Streeter, in *Personal Ethics* (Oxford, 1934), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Ecumenical Review*, no. 1 (1948), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Laski, *Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London, 1943), pp. 71 ff.

## THE CHALLENGE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

Similarly, a writer in the *New Statesman*, 12 June 1948, dealing with Communism in Hungary, says:

Marxism is now a very complete religion. It has its sacred books, its dogmas and philosophy, its martyrs and its heretics. Its gospel is spread by a single party, whose methods and discipline remind one forcibly of the Jesuit Order.

(ii) *Nazism*. In this respect, the National Socialism of Germany, though in many ways the antithesis of Communism, resembles it closely. Hitler saw clearly the value of religion for the maintenance of discipline and morals, and in his orations he constantly invoked the Divine blessing.<sup>1</sup> Even more definitely, the German Faith Movement, which was in close alliance with German National Socialism, was essentially a religious movement. Its leader, William Hauer, affirmed:

Our concern is with religion. In the end, the question comes to this: *Where does God meet us?* . . . We call to the German Nation: 'Awake to the freedom of the German religious genius!'<sup>2</sup>

Essentially religious, too, was the devotion of the German people to their Leader. Again we may quote Laski:

Worship of the Leader is made into a cult. Hitler is the Chosen of God, omniscient, infallible, the Father of his people, half ruler, half priest. . . . His officials express themselves as missionaries of a faith, the power of which is beyond human ken. Its origin is wrapped in mystery, it is not subject to the scrutiny of ordinary rational processes.<sup>3</sup>

(iii) *Italian Fascism*. Benito Mussolini, the *Duce* of Italian Fascism, maintained that Fascism was fundamentally 'a new religious and spiritual conception of life'.<sup>4</sup> In his *Autobiography*, he claims for himself the role of a religious reformer:

In my first speech of November 16th, 1922, after the Fascist Revolution, I concluded by invoking the assistance of God in my difficult task. In the Italian Parliament, the name of God had been banned for a

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., his *Mein Kampf* (Eng. trans., *My Struggle*, London, 1937 ed.), pp. 114 ff.

<sup>2</sup> In *Germany's New Religion* (London, 1937), pp. 52, 70. Cf. A. Frey, *Cross and Swastika* (London, 1938), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Laski, *op. cit.* p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> 'Una concezione spiritualistica religiosa' (*Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol. XIV, p. 847, art. 'Fascism', by B. Mussolini).

long time. . . . It remained for me to make this bold innovation. . . . A faith openly professed is a sign of strength. . . . I have seen the religious spirit bloom again. Churches once more are crowded. Fascism had done, and is doing, its duty.<sup>1</sup>

(iv) *Nationalism*. Nationalism, too, makes its appeal to the mystical and emotional element in human nature, and sounds a supra-rational note of divine authority. For example, Indian Nationalism, while at times presenting itself as a purely secular alternative to the old religions, has also been quite willing to win for itself additional strength by stimulating religious devotion to 'Mother India' as a deity. Even Rabindra Nath Tagore, whose critical and balanced mind saw clearly that unbridled Nationalism (not only in other lands, but also in India), was 'a great menace',<sup>2</sup> sometimes allowed his patriotism to soar into the realm of religious devotion. Edward Thompson, who was his intimate friend, as well as his biographer, has written of him: 'When in 1905 the great [Indian] national movement, with its trumpet-blast of "*Bande Mātaram*" ["Hail to the Mother!"], came, the Poet [Tagore] became its high-priest.'<sup>3</sup>

Nor has the staid Anglo-Saxon always been immune from such emotions. His love of 'Mother England' has often become supra-rational. The patriotism of Lord Palmerston was virtually a 'totalitarianism'; for the one ideal that determined his shifting political policies was the prestige of England: 'We [English] have no eternal allies, no perpetual enemies. *Our interests* are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow. With every British Minister, the interests of England ought to be the shibboleth of policy.'<sup>4</sup> In these words we hear the note of 'total emotion', which is akin to religion. So is the confession of faith by a recent English historian, C. R. L. Fletcher. Though his attitude to legends and enthusiasms in general is one of severe aloofness, he admits

<sup>1</sup> B. Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (Eng. trans. London, 1939 ed.), p. 278. See also E. B. Ashton, *The Fascist, his State and his Mind* (London, 1937), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism* (London, 1917), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> E. Thompson, *Rabindra Nath Tagore* (Oxford, 1926), p. 215. Similarly Aurobindo Ghose, the Bengali mystic, said: 'Nationalism is a religion that comes from God' (quoted by N. Macnicol, *Is Christianity Unique?* [London, 1936], p. 120.)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in L. C. Sanders, *Viscount Palmerston* (Statesmen Series, London, 1888), p. 37.

that for him, Britain is virtually an object of worship: 'My only legend is—"Diva Britannia"!'<sup>1</sup>

(v) *Imperialism*. Imperialism also, though at the moment a waning force in the world, has in the past proved potent in arousing an enthusiasm which is virtually religious. Roman Imperialism inspired Virgil with a mystical fervour which breathes through some of his finest verses;<sup>2</sup> and when Kipling sings the splendours of the British Empire, the note of quasi-religious emotion is heard in every line:

God of our fathers, known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,  
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Kipling is not, indeed, here putting forward Imperialism avowedly as an alternative religion to those which now exist; but he *is* exalting 'the cult of Empire' with a kind of religious fervour, as the supreme manifestation of the divine purpose for the world, and as an ideal which has a 'total' claim upon the loyalty of its subjects, supreme above all other loyalties.

*The underlying consistency in their aims and policies*

This 'religious' claim to an ultimate and absolute authority gives an underlying consistency to the apparently inconsistent policies of the political religions towards Christianity. This again can be illustrated from almost any type of political religion.

(i) *Nazism*. National Socialism in Germany was not at first determined to be anti-Christian. Hitler himself was quite ready to support the German Church, if only the Church would support him unconditionally. The 'six theses' put forth in 1934 by the

<sup>1</sup> *An Introductory History of England* (1904), vol. III, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. *Aen.* vi, 755-853; and especially the closing lines:

*Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;  
Hae tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem  
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos!*  
'Know thyself, Roman, ruler of mankind,—  
That is thy art; impose the law of peace  
Bear with the humbled, and beat down the proud!'  
(F. Richards' translation, London, 1928.)

<sup>3</sup> *The Recessional*.

German Christians who supported the Nazi movement affirmed: 'Through Hitler, Christ has become mighty amongst us. Therefore, National Socialism is positive Christianity in action. . . . Hitler wants the Church. . . . In faith, both State and Church come together for our action.'<sup>1</sup> It was only when the German Confessional Church declared bluntly: 'We reject the false doctrine that the State should become the sole and total order of life, thus fulfilling also the Church's vocation,'<sup>2</sup> that Hitler began to repress and persecute those Christians who would not acknowledge him as supreme head in Church and State alike.

(ii) *Fascism*. Here, too, the attitude and policy towards the Church has varied; but always in accordance with the principle that the interest of the Fascist State is the ultimate standard. Mussolini, who began his career as an avowed atheistic Socialist,<sup>3</sup> soon came to see the political value of an alliance with the Papacy. So by the Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929 he granted to the Holy Father miniature sovereign rights within the *enclave* of the Vatican. This cost the Fascist State little or nothing, and won for it in return the important political asset of the Church's blessing.<sup>4</sup>

Between Spanish Fascism and the Church there has so far been a close alliance, useful to both parties; but whether General Franco would maintain this if the Church began to criticize his policy, is at least open to question.<sup>5</sup>

(iii) *Communism*. Consistency of ultimate aim can even be traced behind the *volte-face* of Soviet policy towards the Church of Russia in recent years. The story of this has been told by Dr Paul Anderson,<sup>6</sup> and may be summarized as follows:

At the time of the 1917 Revolution, the Church and the Bolsheviks anathematized each other.<sup>7</sup> Then followed the severe persecutions of the Church in the 1920's, the propaganda of the League of Militant Atheists, and the anti-religious courses of study at the Russian universities.<sup>8</sup> But it became gradually clear that all

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. Frey, in *Cross and Swastika*, London, 1938, p. 120. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> In 1904, a pamphlet by Mussolini, entitled *God does not exist!* was widely circulated in an English translation in the U.S.A. (F. A. Ridley, *The Papacy and Fascism* (London, 1937), p. 198).

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *Franco's Rule—a Survey* (United Editorial, London, 1939).

<sup>6</sup> P. Anderson, *People, Church, and State in Modern Russia* (London, 1944).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 42 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 60-120.

this was not succeeding in its effort to destroy the Church. Then came the German invasion of 1941, which aroused the patriotic fervour of every Russian, Christian and non-Christian alike. Thereupon Sergius, the Patriarch of Moscow, invoked God's blessing on the Red Army, and called on the faithful to support the Soviet war-effort. Stalin promptly responded with thanks and cordiality,<sup>1</sup> and since then, open persecution of the Church in Russia has virtually ceased. This, however, has not implied any weakening of the official atheism of the Soviet. Its purpose is solely 'to strengthen the Socialist system';<sup>2</sup> and if the Russian Church at any point were to take an anti-Communist line in public affairs, then (as Dr Anderson says) '[the Soviet government] knows how to handle a revival of religion, if this should tend towards disloyalty, or threaten to assume a position of power, in conflict with the official ideology of atheism'.<sup>3</sup>

*The moral element in their challenge*

One other point needs to be born in mind, if we would rightly understand the challenge of the political religions to Christianity. This is their appeal to the moral sense of humanity. It is true that totalitarianism often plays upon the lower emotions and herd-instincts of mankind—greed and jealousy, suspicion and hatred. But there is in it also a finer note.

Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's Fascism, with all their brutality, had within them a Puritan strain, which was better than the slack morality (or immorality) that they challenged, and which achieved genuine reforms in personal and public life.<sup>4</sup>

In Marxist Communism, the moral paradox is even more startling and perplexing. It is founded on a Dialectical Materialism which affirms ruthlessly the maxim that 'the end justifies the means'. Lenin asserted that in order to establish Communism, 'it

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 22, 110, 118. According to the *New York Times*, 19 Nov. 1941, Stalin on this occasion piously ejaculated: 'May God help President Roosevelt!'

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.* p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151. See also N. S. Timashev, *Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917-42* (London, 1943); or N. Zernov, *The Russians and their Church* (London, 1945).

<sup>4</sup> This is admitted by many who are far from 'totalitarian' in their own sympathies; e.g. by Wickham Steed, *Hitler* (London, 1934), pp. 55, 67; and by M. H. MacCartney, *One Man Alone* [Mussolini] (London, 1944), pp. 146 f.

is necessary to use any ruse, cunning unlawful method, evasion, concealment of truth'; and Stalin advocates 'unlimited power, resting on violence and not on law'.<sup>1</sup> Yet side by side with this we find in many Communists an unmistakably genuine indignation with wrong, and a sympathy with the poor and oppressed. No one can read Marx's *Capital* without being conscious of this.<sup>2</sup> Indeed a Christian speaker from Holland at the Amsterdam Conference of 1948 said: 'Marx and Engels saw the *moral* side of the social problem *better* than the Christian Church.'<sup>3</sup> Of Lenin, too, ruthless as he was, an English biographer has written: 'He gave up every joy and reward that men normally seek, and bent his whole being to his self-imposed task. . . . Nowhere [in history] is to be found in any single man the peculiar combination of devotion, courage, wisdom, skill and human understanding, except in the man Lenin.'<sup>4</sup> There is surely a deeper note here than that of pure Dialectical Materialism. It is sounded again in Stalin's funeral oration over Lenin: 'We vow to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will not spare our lives to strengthen and extend the union of the toilers of the whole world!'<sup>5</sup>

This note of moral enthusiasm constantly recurs in Communist literature. 'Logically,' says a Christian writer, 'justice, indignation, loyalty, have no place in Communism; actually, they appear in it regularly'.<sup>6</sup> All this is winning for Communism the support of many who would otherwise be repelled by its ruthlessness.<sup>7</sup> In this strange, paradoxical union of cold ruthlessness and fervent enthusiasm lies the heart of the Religion of Political Totalitarianism, which is confronting the Church today with a challenge that is at present rapidly increasing in strength, and may in the near future become insistent in any quarter of the globe.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Sir N. Angell in *The Steep Places* (London, 1947), p. 180, from Lenin's *Infantile Sickness of Leftism*, and Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., his vivid pen-pictures of the misery of the English factory hands in the nineteenth century in ch. viii, 'The Working Day', or in his description of the English Working Classes (E. and C. Paul's translation, London, 1928), pp. 738-44.

<sup>3</sup> Dr C. L. Patijn, in vol. III of the *Amsterdam Series*, 1948, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> *Lenin*, by J. Maxton (London, 1932), pp. 171, 173.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Essentials of Lenin* (London, 1947), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> A. Miller, *The Christian Significance of Karl Marx* (London, 1946), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> See below, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> See P. Hutchinson, *The New Leviathan* (Chicago, 1946).

## THE CHALLENGE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

Among other movements of our day that are sometimes reckoned among the rivals of Christianity are Scientific Humanism, Neo-Mysticism, and even 'the Democratic Faith'.<sup>1</sup> But these are less distinctively religious than the political totalitarianisms, and so they hardly come within our purview in these lectures.

Today, however, the Church is confronted not only by political 'totalitarianisms', but also by a challenge from movements that are explicitly religious; and to these we must now turn.

## THE CHALLENGE FROM THE NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

It is often said that our age is one of increasing materialism, and that it is in revolt against all forms of religion. To some extent this is true. But side by side with this, there are unmistakable signs of religious revivals in many quarters. Sometimes these are associated with political movements, and are encouraged and used by politicians for their own ends.<sup>2</sup> Even then, however, the religious element, though subordinate, is not unimportant; for a combination of politics and religion produces a compound of immense dynamic energy. This has been the case again and again in the history of the Church. It was so at the Reformation, and in the 'wars of religion' on the Continent of Europe; it was so in the Commonwealth and Restoration periods of English history; it is so in Ireland today. It is even more so in lands traditionally non-Christian. Hinduism in India, Islam in Pakistan, Buddhism in Burma and Ceylon, are closely linked with political programmes, giving to them on the one hand the spiritual power of a religious sanction, and receiving from them in turn a sense of 'immediate urgency' which a purely religious motive rarely gives.

So we find many of the non-Christian religions, in alliance with political movements, asserting their claims today with fresh vigour; and now that all parts of the world are in close mutual contact, these claims are being brought more prominently before the notice of Christendom than at any time since the early centuries

<sup>1</sup> All these are included among 'Rival Secular Faiths' by Dr W. Pauck of the U.S.A. at the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1948. (See vol. II of the *Amsterdam Series*, pp. 39-43.)

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 7-9.

of the Christian Era, and certainly much more than was the case in the nineteenth century.

They bring a challenge that is both negative and positive. On the one hand, they deny the claim of Christianity to be the final—or even the highest—type of religion; on the other hand, they invite Christians to join with them in resisting the advance of materialism and scepticism. Both these challenges are to a large extent recent developments, or at least revivals.

*Their present refusal to admit the superiority of Christianity*

The main tradition of Christendom has always claimed that the Christian religion is not only superior to all others, but is final and absolute truth for all time.<sup>1</sup> This claim has, indeed, never been (and is never likely to be) admitted by the adherents of other faiths; but not a few of them have been willing to accord to Christianity a position of *supremacy* among the religions of the world. Even this admission has not been without exceptions. It would have been repudiated by the pagan philosophers of the early Christian centuries, and also by the leaders of Islam during the days of its first triumphant advance. But in general, there was little disposition in Europe, from the fourth century to the nineteenth, to dispute the supremacy of Christianity. Indeed, its prestige remained so high that to question this seemed both dangerous and absurd.

Even in the nineteenth century, the great Oriental religions at first met the attacks of Christian Missions mainly with defensive tactics. They pleaded that they represented venerable traditions, well-adapted to the genius of their people, and sufficient to meet their needs. But so long as their continued existence was not threatened, they showed little inclination to assert their own superiority, and were often quite ready to express admiration for the teachings of Christ.

For example, Ram Mohun Roy, one of the founders of the reformed Hindu Society known as the 'Brahmo Samaj', though he lived and died a Hindu,<sup>2</sup> was outspoken in his admiration for

<sup>1</sup> For a consideration of this claim, see below, pp. 146-51.

<sup>2</sup> Some of Ram Mohun's English Unitarian friends claimed that he died a Christian. But as against this, it seems clear that (a) he specially asked that he should *not* be buried

the character and teaching of Jesus. In 1824, he published a collection of extracts from the Gospels, under the title of *The Precepts of Jesus*; and in the Introduction to this he wrote as follows: 'This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas, . . . and so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race, . . . that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in its present form.'<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of the nineteenth century, another leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Kesub Chunder Sen (d. 1884), indulged in rhapsodical praise of Jesus, as 'Son of God', 'the brightest jewel of my heart', and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Keshub, no doubt, was a devotee rather than a clear thinker. But most of the stalwarts of liberal Hinduism in the nineteenth century, though not given to devotional outbursts, maintained close and friendly contacts with Christian missionaries, spoke of them and their teaching with respect, and endeavoured to imitate their methods.<sup>3</sup> In more recent years, Rabindra Nath Tagore (though he confessed that he never read the Bible, and became more and more attached to Hinduism as he grew older),<sup>4</sup> always spoke of Christ and Christianity with high regard.<sup>5</sup>

In Islam, too, in the nineteenth century, a similar note prevailed, especially among 'reforming' Muslim leaders. In the *Mahomedan Commentary on the Bible*, published at Ghazipur in 1862 by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, founder of Aligarh Muslim University, the

with Christian rites, and that to the end he kept his sacred brahminical thread on his body (see Mary Carpenter, *The Last Days of Ram Mohun Roy* (London, 1875), pp. 131, 137); (b) The last word that he uttered on his deathbed was the sacred Hindu syllable OM (*Precepts of Jesus*, 1834 ed., *Memoir*, p. xxi); and (c) he always insisted that he was opposed, not to *true Hinduism*, but only to a perversion of it (*ibid.* p. xi).

<sup>1</sup> *Precepts of Jesus*, 1834 ed., p. vii. Dr J. N. Farquhar quotes Ram Mohun as going further, and admitting that Christ's teaching is not only worthy of admiration, but *superior* to all others:—'I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of moral beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge' (*Modern Religious Movements in India* [London, 1918], p. 32).

<sup>2</sup> See Farquhar, *op. cit.* p. 65, or P. C. Mozoomdar, *The Oriental Christ* (Boston, 1898), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Sir Narayan Chandavarker, speaking at the Y.M.C.A. in Bombay, 14 June, 1910, said: 'The ideas that lie at the root of the Gospel of Christ are slowly but surely permeating every part of Hindu Society' (J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* [Oxford, 1913], p. 54; cf. his *Modern Religious Movements*, pp. 80 f., 444 f.).

<sup>4</sup> E. J. Thompson, *Rabindra Nath Tagore* (Calcutta, 1921), p. 100; and his larger *Rabindra Nath Tagore* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 193, 264.

<sup>5</sup> In 1916, Tagore wrote for an American Magazine, *The Quest*, an article on 'the Appeal of Christ to India', in which he said: 'Who else has done so much for humanity?'

editor, while criticizing many doctrines of the Christian Church, says: 'We Mahomedans hold that Jesus Christ is honourable in this world, and in the world to come. . . . The Apostles of Christ were inspired men. . . . The *Injeel* [the Gospels] are all true and sacred records, proceeding primarily from God.'<sup>1</sup> The gist of the contention of Sir Syed and many of his followers was, that 'true Islam is but true Christianity writ short'.<sup>2</sup>

As long as the greater non-Christian religions shewed this attitude of respect towards Christ and his religion, it was not likely that any of the lesser ethnic cults would seriously challenge the supremacy of Christianity. During the last half-century, however, a marked change has taken place in the attitude of the non-Christian religions towards Christianity. Most of them are now contending that the Christian religion, so far from being perfect, is definitely inferior to the alternative which they themselves can offer.

(i) *Islam*. This claim has been made (as we should expect) with especial vigour by Islam in recent years. In 1922, Syed Ameer Ali, in *The Spirit of Islam*, maintained that in every department of life, the teaching and example of Muhammad is superior to that of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> In 1928, Maulana Muhammad Ali (of the *Ahmadiya* movement), wrote in the introduction to his English translation of the Qur'an:

The Holy Qur'an is a judge to decide the differences of the various religions, and a perfect revelation of the Divine Will. . . . The transformation wrought by the Holy Qur'an is unparalleled in the history of the world, and thus its claim to being [sic] unique stands as unchallenged today as it did thirteen centuries ago.<sup>4</sup>

Still more recently, a brilliant modern exponent of Islam, Sir Md. Iqbal, has affirmed that while European (Christian) ideas are today hindering the progress of humanity, Islam alone points the true way of advance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 10, 32. In this, Sir Sayyid was following the example of the great Muslim theologian of the eleventh century, Al-Ghazzali, and other Sufi mystics, who in their controversies with the Christians used to appeal to New Testament texts (see Godfrey Phillips, *The O.T. in the World Church* [London, 1942], p. 152).

<sup>2</sup> W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (London, 1946), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> See chs. iv-ix. Cf. Sheikh Mohd. Kidwai, *The Miracle of Muhammad* (London, 1906).

<sup>4</sup> Introduction, pp. xxviii, xxxiii.

<sup>5</sup> *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought* (Oxford, 1934), p. 170.

(ii) *Hinduism*. Modern exponents of Hinduism, while extolling the virtue of religious toleration,<sup>1</sup> at the same time claim for Hinduism a place not only of supremacy, but even of finality. Radhakrishnan says: 'The Vedānta is not "a religion", but Religion itself, in its most universal and deepest significance';<sup>2</sup> and holds that all that is good in subsequent philosophy is implicit in the Upanishads.<sup>3</sup> One of Tagore's biographers affirms: 'The Hindu religion includes and transcends Christ's religion'.<sup>4</sup>

Still more recently, D. S. Sarma's *Renaissance in India* (1944) reflects a similar confidence in the supremacy of Hinduism. This is shared also by many of its European devotees, as for example, the contributors to C. Isherwood's *Vedanta for the Western World* (London, 1948); and by Romain Rolland in France, who endorses Aurobindo Ghose's belief that Hindu India 'possesses the key to the progress of humanity'.<sup>5</sup> In short, everywhere the attitude of Hinduism towards Christianity has been changing over from that of defence to that of confident attack. 'It is no longer concerned to amend its ways, but to assert its claims'.<sup>6</sup>

A similar change is apparent in other non-Christian religions.

(iii) *Buddhism*. Its modern apologists claim that 'Buddhism is Wisdom, free from all the sub-division of petty minds',<sup>7</sup> and that 'Buddhism is not "a religion", but "Actuality"'.<sup>8</sup>

(iv) *Confucianism*. Although 'there is in it practically nothing of a religious nature',<sup>9</sup> it has been commended by an eminent English scholar as a way of life 'more practical than Christianity'.<sup>10</sup>

(v) *Zoroastrianism*. To day (at least as found in the Parsi community in India), it is stiff and unyielding in its repudiation of Christian claims.<sup>11</sup>

(vi) *Sikhism* is equally self-confident.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London, 1927), pp. 19 ff. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (London, 1920), p. 451.

<sup>4</sup> K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, *Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore* (Madras, 1916), p. 494.

<sup>5</sup> *Prophets of the New India* (London, Eng. trans. 1930), p. 503 n.

<sup>6</sup> N. Macnicol, in the *Report of the Jerusalem Missionary Conference* (1928), vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Buddhism Applied* (Buddhist Lodge, London, 1931). Cf. G. P. Malalasekera, *This have I heard* (Colombo, 1943). <sup>8</sup> P. Dahlke, *Buddhism* (London, 1927), p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> W. G. Walshe, in *Hastings E.R.E.*, vol. IV, p. 174, art. 'Confucianism'.

<sup>10</sup> H. A. Giles, *Confucianism* (Hibbert Lectures, 1914), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> See J. H. Moulton, *The Treasure of the Magi* (Oxford, 1917), pp. 217-23.

<sup>12</sup> See J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements* (London, 1918), pp. 340 ff.

(vii) *China and Japan*. At the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, the delegates from these lands reported that the superiority of Christianity over other religions was almost universally denied among their people.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Kraemer has summed up the modern attitude of the non-Christian world towards Christianity as follows:

Everywhere—in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, etc.,—there is manifest in the Eastern World today, along with the general national realization, a movement towards the heightening of religious group-consciousness, embodying itself in movements for reform, reorganization, propaganda, consolidation and concerted opposition to Christian Missions.<sup>2</sup>

(viii) *Modern Religious Movements*. Besides the ancient non-Christian religions, there are also in the modern world a number of other avowedly religious movements which claim to be able to offer alternatives to Christianity that are superior to it.

*Modern Liberal Judaism* (though not on the whole aggressive or missionary), presents itself as a reasonable Theism, suitable for all mankind, in which the values of orthodox Judaism and orthodox Christianity are conserved, and at the same time are freed from the supernatural elements and dogmas which offer obstacles to many minds.<sup>3</sup>

*Theosophy*, while professing that it ‘belongs to all religions’ and is ‘the defender and helper of all religions’,<sup>4</sup> also claims the right to transcend them all, and even utters threats against any who dare to question this claim: ‘Woe!’ (cries Mrs Besant) ‘unto that religion which rejects the teaching of the Ancient Wisdom, and turns its back on the heralds who proclaim it. . . . We [Theosophists] are the heralds of the Great Ones.’<sup>5</sup>

*Spiritualism* and *Christian Science* also claim that they have proved themselves able to lead many souls into a deeper and more

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Conference* (1910), vol. iv, pp. 45, 78. <sup>2</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> ‘We want Jewish ideas to spread; we would like to see the whole world united under them’ (O. Lazarus, *Liberal Judaism* (London, 1937), p. 93). Miss Lazarus, however, recognizes that, as a rule, Jews have little desire to proselytize.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs Besant, *London Lectures on Theosophy* (1907), p. 47. Cf. her *Theosophy* (People’s Books, London, 1912), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Theosophy and Human Life* (Benares, 1905), p. 270. Cf. W. S. Urquhart, *Theosophy and Christian Thought* (London, 1922), p. 163, etc.

satisfying religious experience than any that Christianity has been able to provide.<sup>1</sup>

There are also innumerable modern religious movements, some of which seem to be tending to coalesce into what is variously called '*the New Gnosis*', or '*the Wisdom Religion*', or '*the Nameless Religion*'; and these too maintain that Christianity has been transcended by a higher religion, which has in it an element of absolute finality. One of the ablest exponents of this new cult, Mr Lawrence Hyde, writes of it thus:

Amidst all the conflict and confusions, the sympathetic observer can trace the emerging outlines of a new form of religion, . . . what may prove to be the ground-plan of the Temple in which our spiritual descendants are destined to worship. The structure which thus discloses itself is *absolutely fundamental*—that of that Wisdom Religion which by a *metaphysical necessity* must provide the interior key to all exterior symbolisations and observances. . . . It is the Way which leads back to Origin, and it follows 'the Pattern of the Cross'.<sup>2</sup>

This 'pattern', however, is not that of the Cross as interpreted by historic Christianity; for Mr Hyde continues:

The great majority of those who are finding their way back to religion, from scepticism and materialism, are not returning to the faith of their fathers, but to some form of the Wisdom Religion. . . . The Neo-Gnostic interprets the Incarnation as a process everlastingly being accomplished within the souls of all men and women; and from this he derives a wonderful sense of exaltation; it enables him to feel mystically one with every child of God.<sup>3</sup>

It certainly seems clear that the widespread reaction against materialism that is evident in many quarters today is not necessarily leading men back to the Christian Church, but is rather strengthening the note of challenge to the distinctive claims of organized Christianity.

But we must now consider another type of challenge to the Church from the non-Christian religions.

<sup>1</sup> For Christian Science, see Mrs Baker Eddy's *Science and Health* (Boston, 1875), 1934 ed.; and for *Spiritualism*, see the symposium on *Spiritualism*, ed. by H. Carter, (London, 1920); or H. Anson, *The Truth about Spiritualism* (London, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Hyde, *The Wisdom Religion Today* (Burning-Glass Paper, no 13), pp. 4 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 22, 28.

*Their invitation to inter-religious co-operation*

(i) *Hinduism*. This appeal is coming to the Church today from many quarters, and in particular from neo-Hinduism. The Hindu tradition of toleration and comprehension seems to fit it peculiarly for this role of religious mediator. One of its ablest exponents, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, has suggested that individual loyalty to one's own religion should be akin to the loyalty of a schoolboy or student to his school or college—a loyalty which, however genuine and enthusiastic, does not hesitate to allow (and even to expect) others to be equally loyal to *their* own traditions.<sup>1</sup> This line of thought was welcomed in England by man, and notably by C. E. M. Joad, as offering the most hopeful and effective defence today against materialism, and a rallying ground for all who value spiritual ideals. He regards Radhakrishnan as a valuable 'liaison-officer' between Eastern and Western thought.<sup>2</sup>

Even more influential has been the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi on this same subject.

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the different religions. . . . Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, etc., is not only bound to fail, but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. . . . Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture.<sup>3</sup>

My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal.<sup>4</sup>

Again: 'I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mahomed or Zoroaster.' And in reply to the question: 'Would you not say that Jesus was the *most* divine?', he answers: 'No!'<sup>5</sup>

(ii) *Buddhism*. The invitation to the Church to abandon its exclusive claims and join in co-operation with other religions is heard not only from the side of Hinduism, but also from Buddhism, especially the 'neo-Buddhism' of Western lands. 'Whatever a man believes to be true, he will naturally . . . wish to share with

<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Counter-Attack from the East* (London, 1933), chap. 1, and *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions* (Ahmedabad, 1941), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 170, 172.

his fellow-men.<sup>1</sup> 'The Christian . . . the Freethinker . . . the Social Reformer . . ., all of them will find in Buddhism a friend, and no enemy.'<sup>2</sup>

(iii) *Islam*. Even Islam, though on the whole the most uncompromising of all the great religions, occasionally sounds a more conciliatory note today, at any rate in its relation to the other 'religions of the Book',—Judaism and Christianity. For example, Mr S. Mohd. Fossil of Madras, writing in 1924 on 'Conversion—a Muslim view', says: 'Islam does not desire that these religions ["of the Book"] should cease to exist or be annihilated. . . . It is the great plan of God that there should be a number of religions.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Principal S. A. W. Bukhari, of the Jamalia Arabic College, Madras, writes: 'Revelation is not the monopoly of one section of the people to the exclusion of another. . . . Allah is not the God of the Jews or Christians or Muslims only.'<sup>4</sup> It may be that such sentiments would not receive the support of orthodox Muslims; but they indicate that even Islam is not wholly impervious to the spirit of co-operation.

(iv) *Modern religious movements*. In the Theosophical movement, too, the invitation to inter-religious co-operation is prominent, and it claims to be able to extract from all religions the essential truths, and combine them into a New Truth. 'The Secret Doctrine is the essence of all these [religions]. . . . Its aim is to rescue from degradation the archaic truths which are the basis of all religions; and to uncover the fundamental unity from which they all spring.'<sup>5</sup> Again, from the modern 'Wisdom Religion', a similar invitation is echoed: 'Let those of every school and cult share freely with others any spiritual knowledge; . . . then each will move towards a more comprehensive and balanced form of faith.'<sup>6</sup>

#### *Political and scientific support for this invitation*

This call to inter-religious co-operation derives support from

<sup>1</sup> *What is Buddhism?* (London, 1931), p. 181. Many examples of practical co-operation between Buddhists and Christians in America are given by D. J. Fleming, *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths* (New York, 1929).

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhism* (the Buddhist Mission in England), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> In *Conversion and Co-operation in Religion* (Madras, 1924), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Way Through' (Madras, 1937), p. 177.

<sup>5</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (Point Loma, U.S.A., 1909), vol. 1, p. viii.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Hyde, *The Wisdom Religion Today*, p. 30.

two prevalent trends of modern thought, one political, and the other scientific.

(i) *Co-operation in politics.* Two world-wars, and the ever-mounting tension of ill-will and suspicion between nations, communities and classes, have driven many men and women of good will to the conviction that at all costs another and better way must be found. They are convinced that even though, so far, all attempts to establish an effective League of Nations have failed, these efforts must be renewed and sustained until success is achieved, because only thus can civilization be saved from utter destruction.

This encourages a parallel line of thought in the sphere of religion. Radhakrishnan, after reference to the modern reaction against imperialism and totalitarianism in politics, says: 'I see no hope for the religious future of the world, if this ideal is not extended to the religious sphere.'<sup>1</sup> It is felt by many that religion of every kind is today suffering heavily in prestige because of the bitterness of inter-religious strife in the past, and especially through the attempts of this or that type of religion to dominate all others. Within Christendom itself, one of the chief motives underlying the movement towards Christian reunion has been an increasing recognition of 'the great danger we are in by reason of our unhappy divisions'; and today there are many, both within and outside the Church, who are asking themselves whether this movement towards closer mutual understanding and co-operation may not—indeed, *must* not—be extended to the relations between Christians and non-Christians, with a view to the creation of some kind of 'League of Religions'.

All this is strengthening the conviction that, just as totalitarianism in politics is a menace to the peace of mankind, so is absolutism in religion; and that in both politics and religion, the urgent call of today is: 'Federate, or perish!'<sup>2</sup>

(ii) *'Relativism' in Science.* Another tendency of modern thought which is strengthening the movement for inter-religious co-

<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of some of the problems involved in inter-religious co-operation, see below, pp. 128-31, and 195-8.

operation is derived from the principles and methods of Natural Science. The scientific mind is trained to observe facts, to weigh evidence, and to pronounce judgments on matters of truth and error. But Science never claims to have attained to final or absolute Truth, and would emphatically reject any such claim in its own sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, in the field of Comparative Religion, research has brought to light not only the bewildering variety of religious beliefs and practices, but also the innumerable points of resemblance between religious systems which in the past have considered themselves separate from, and even antagonistic towards, one another. With regard to Christianity, in particular, it has become clear that many features in its teaching and practice that were formerly assumed to be unique have, in fact, close parallels in other religions. For example, the ideas of Atonement, Incarnation and Resurrection, as well as of the three-foldness of the Divine Nature, have been found to be woven into the texture of religion in many of its historical forms.<sup>2</sup> Recent research has also shown that even in the teaching of Jesus Christ the parallels with the teachings of other religions are much closer than was formerly realized. A great New Testament scholar, Sir E. Hoskyns, says: 'The attempts of Christian scholars to find *new* ethical or moral standards in Jesus has completely broken down. Jewish scholars have shown that there is no single moral aphorism recorded as spoken by Jesus which cannot be paralleled in Rabbinic literature.'<sup>3</sup>

No doubt, for a well-instructed Christian, there is here no cause for alarm.

If Jesus Christ is anything like what His followers have believed Him to be, then we should expect to find in His teaching a continuity with all that the Spirit of God has revealed to men everywhere. And we do

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Prof. J. A. Thomson, *An Introduction to Science* (Home University Library, 1934), pp. 22-9. For a discussion of Relativism, see below, pp. 146-51.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed evidence of this can be found in Estlin Carpenter's *Comparative Religion* (Home University Library, 1913), ch. II; or his *Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (London, 1904), *passim*. See also Archbishop Söderblom's Gifford Lectures, 1931 (*The Living God*, chaps. viii-x); or Dr Bouquet's *Comparative Religion*, in the Pelican Library (1942). Cf. E. F. Scott, *The Gospel and its Tributaries* (Edinburgh, 1928), pp. 1-22.

<sup>3</sup> Hoskyns and Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London, 1931), p. 169; cf. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (H.E.C.), vol. I, p. 54.

## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

in fact find this, not only within the Biblical revelation, but in other religions also.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, for those who have been brought up to believe that Christianity alone is true, and all other religions are simply false, the discovery of these resemblances has come as a shock to their faith in the uniqueness of Christianity. As a result, some have been led to view all forms of religion with scepticism;<sup>2</sup> others with sympathy and understanding, even for the cruder and more primitive types.<sup>3</sup> In either case, they generally take it for granted that no one existing religion can provide the world with a final or absolute expression of truth; and that if religion in any shape is to retain its hold on mankind in the future, it will have to be in some form that will draw its inspiration from more than one of the existing faiths, and will be based on the *total* religious experience of mankind.<sup>4</sup> This assumption obviously challenges the claim to 'World-Dominion' which the Christian Church has, in fact, made for itself all through its history.

## THE NEED FOR AN ANSWER TO THESE CHALLENGES

In 1945, Sir Cyril Norwood, President of St John's College, Oxford, giving his presidential address to the Modern Churchmen's Union, spoke of 'the directions towards which the thoughts of young people are turned today, without receiving any clear guidance from the Church'. He placed first of all among these the problems raised by the study of Comparative Religion, and the practical issues involved in the foreign mission-field; secondly, the problem of Christian unity; and thirdly, the challenge of Communism.<sup>5</sup> If that is a true estimate, then two at least of these 'priorities' for the Church coincide with the challenges that we have been considering today.

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London, 1928), p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> 'There is room for every religion . . . without implicit negation of any claim—*save*, of course, that of objective truth or credibility' (!) (J. M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs* [London, 1911], p. 58).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., R. R. Marett, *Faith, Hope and Charity in Primitive Religion* (Oxford, 1932); or his Gifford Lectures, *Sacraments of Simple Folk* (Oxford, 1933).

<sup>4</sup> See Estlin Carpenter, *Studies in Theology* (London, 1903), p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> *The Modern Churchman* (Sept. 1945), pp. 102-13.

In our next lecture we shall review the answers to these challenges that are at present forthcoming from the side of the Church; and in our last two lectures we shall consider whether these are adequate, or whether there is need for us to recover some principles that have been lost sight of, and to modify the present policy and practice of the Church's missionary work. Meanwhile, one thing at least seems clear: that at present the answers that are forthcoming from the Church are not effectively checking the apparent decline of organized Christianity in the West, nor stimulating decisive revivals of missionary enthusiasm.

*In 'Christendom' of the West*

Admittedly it is very difficult to judge the large-scale rise and fall of religious vitality, at home or abroad; but with regard to Western 'Christendom', the evidence of the decline of the Church as an organization seems clear and conclusive.

(i) *Britain.* During the past half century, there have been a number of surveys of religious thought and practice in England;<sup>1</sup> and in every case the result points in the same direction. We may take two recent examples of these.

(a) In 1948, a survey was made of religious opinions in a London suburb, and a Report was published, of which the main conclusion is, that the decay of popular belief in orthodox Christianity has left a 'vacuum', in which there is a confused chaos of inconsistent ideas, styled in the Report 'The Great Muddle'. Roughly two-thirds of the male population, and four-fifths of the female, profess some kind of belief in God; the rest are doubtful, or negative. Twelve per cent of the men and five per cent of the women do not profess to feel even admiration (let alone worship) for the person of Jesus Christ. Sixty per cent of the whole population never attend Church, except for weddings and funerals; and only about ten per cent attend regularly.<sup>2</sup>

(b) A volume under the title *Has the Church failed?* was published

<sup>1</sup> Earlier surveys were made in 1886 and 1900; and each of these showed a decline in the proportion of those who adhere to the Church and join in its worship (see Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century* [London, 1946], p. 59).

<sup>2</sup> *Puzzled People*, issued by 'Mass Observation' (London, 1948), pp. 7 f., 15, 21, 50, 60, 62.

in 1947, and contains articles by professing Christians of various denominations.<sup>1</sup> This, too, reflects widespread misgivings, even among the leaders of the Church. The Bishop of London (Dr J. C. Wand) admits a drift away from the Church during the last fifty years. The Very Rev. Dr J. H. Cockburn, an ex-Moderator of the Church of Scotland, writes: 'We [Christians] have been, and are, fighting a battle of life and death, and have been losing it for some generations.' Similar views are expressed by nearly all the contributors; a notable exception, however, being Mr Douglas Woodruff, the Roman Catholic editor of *The Tablet*, who is confident and optimistic about the future of his Church.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) *America.* In America the hold of organized religion upon the people appears to be stronger than in England. Estimates generally seem to reckon that over fifty per cent of the people profess allegiance to some Christian denomination; but it seems to be generally admitted that with the majority of these, there is but little intelligent understanding of Christianity, or genuine Christian experience.<sup>3</sup>

(iii) *The British Dominions.* With regard to Australia, Bishop Burgmann, the Anglican Bishop of Goulburn, wrote in 1947 in the *Christian News-Letter*<sup>4</sup> that the bulk of the people are 'out of touch with any form of organized religion'. Of New Zealand, the Anglican Dean of Christ Church has said that 'the general environment is materialistic', and that 'freedom generally means "freedom not to worship"'.<sup>5</sup>

(iv) *Europe.* On the Continent of Europe there has undoubtedly been a remarkable intensification of Christian faith and zeal in many of the Churches which have suffered persecution. But so far, this revival has not touched more than a small minority of the population; and indeed, those who have been most influenced by it hardly seem to expect that it will become widespread.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Sir J. Marchant (London, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> See pp. x, 45, 83 ff. For a more recent estimate, see *English Life and Leisure*, by B. S. Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, chap. XIII ('Religion') (London, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> See W. S. Sperry, *Religion in America* (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 255-8, and cf. Dr Latourette in *I.R.M.* (April 1947), pp. 231-52, 'The Church in the Anglo-American World.'

<sup>4</sup> No. 285 (14 May 1947).

<sup>5</sup> In Leiper's *Christianity Today* (London, 1948), p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9 f, 32, 46.

*In foreign mission-fields*

Strictly speaking, this term, implying as it does the division of the world into 'Christendom' and 'heathendom', is, in our modern world, an anachronism; for the whole world is today largely non-Christian.<sup>1</sup> But it may serve to denote those lands where Christianity is relatively a newcomer, and where the ancient religions have in the past been non-Christian. In these, it is even more difficult to form a true estimate of the situation as a whole; for the fields are very varied, and the conditions differ widely from one another. The secretaries of some missionary societies consider that there is in many quarters a marked increase of interest in Foreign Missions. This seems to be strongest in circles where the theology is 'Fundamentalist' or 'Neo-orthodox'; but it is also aroused by the conception of Missions as an enterprise in international understanding.<sup>2</sup>

A hopeful view of the situation is also taken by a leading Church-historian of our day, Prof. K. S. Latourette, who is confident that the present apparent set-back to organized Christianity, is only temporary and will be followed by an advance greater than any that has gone before.<sup>3</sup> But many experienced missionary leaders seem to think that Dr Latourette's estimate is over-optimistic.<sup>4</sup>

A perusal of recent volumes of the *International Review of Missions* will show that for some forty years past there have been misgivings in missionary circles that all is not well with the missionary enterprise. As far back as 1912 and 1913, when the flood-tide of missionary enthusiasm seemed to be at its height, we find missionary writers lamenting 'the cooling of missionary interest', and 'the oppressive sense of failure'.<sup>5</sup> In 1934, an American observer's opinion was that 'Missions are marking time, if not in retreat'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Bishop G. Allen, *The Theology of Missions* (London, 1943), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is based mainly on private correspondence received by the author; it is confirmed by the Rev. R. Smith in *I.R.M.* (Oct. 1945), 'Evangelism in the New Age', pp. 412-20.

<sup>3</sup> *The Unquenchable Light* (London, 1945), chs. viii and ix; cf. *H.E.C.*, vol. vii, p. 504. In 1949, Dr Latourette reaffirmed this conviction, in his *Prospect for Christianity*; especially in ch. iii, 'The Long Perspective'. <sup>4</sup> e.g. Dr J. S. Whale, in *I.R.M.* (Oct. 1945), p. 427.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. C. H. Patton in *I.R.M.* (July 1912), p. 487; and 'A Missionary' in *I.R.M.* (April 1913), p. 211. <sup>6</sup> Oscar Buck, *Christianity Tested* (New York, 1934), p. 14.

In 1939, the Rev. H. Riggs, Secretary of the Near East Missionary Council, lamented 'the devastating fact that, on the whole, Church members are losing faith in the missionary enterprise'.<sup>1</sup> A less sombre view has been lately taken by Canon McLeod Campbell, Missionary Secretary of the Church Assembly of the Church of England. He is of opinion that there is a growing appreciation of Foreign Missions today; but he thinks that this is due more to admiration for their social and humanitarian work, than to agreement with their aims in the field of evangelism.<sup>2</sup> In 1948, Dr Max Warren, the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, admitted that 'to speak of "the triumphant progress of the Gospel" is simply not true today', and suggested that the Church may be likened more aptly to a 'resistance movement' operating in enemy territory, than to an advancing army, or even a settled colonizing power.<sup>3</sup>

In any case—whether we lean towards an optimistic or a pessimistic estimate—certain facts are clear. First, that the missionary cause has not yet won the support of the Church *as a whole* in any land. Everywhere it depends upon the support of a relatively small minority of devoted Church-people. Secondly, that the present rate of conversions to Christianity, large though it is in some parts of the world, is not nearly sufficient to keep pace with the total increase in the world's population. The Tambaram Conference of 1938 noted that 'there are more non-Christians in the world today than there were ten years ago'.<sup>4</sup> In 1946, Dr Merle Davies—an expert on missionary statistics—estimated the situation as follows: 'While the non-Roman Catholic Churches of the world are evangelizing between *one and two million* non-Christians a year, in each twelve months a net *twenty to twenty-five*

<sup>1</sup> In *I.R.M.* (July 1939), p. 528. In *I.R.M.*, July 1943, another missionary fears that missions are drifting, without a clear sense of direction.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian History in the Making* (London, 1946), p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Triumph of God* (London, 1948), pp. 352, 360. Similar opinions have been expressed by William Paton (general secretary of the International Missionary Council, in *I.R.M.* [1942], p. 389, where he notes the decline in outstanding missionary-leadership, especially in India, and by Dr Alfred Hogg (formerly Principal of Madras Christian College), who thinks there has been an unmistakable 'decline in the conviction of the urgency of the missionary call', since the early days of the Student Volunteer Missionary Union (*The Christian Message to the Hindu* [London, 1947], p. 88).

<sup>4</sup> *Tambaram Report*, vol. III, p. 412.

#### THE CHALLENGE FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

millions are added to the non-Christian population of the world.<sup>1</sup> If that is even approximately correct, then obviously the prospect that the whole world will become 'Christian' is, humanly speaking, becoming more and more remote each year, and it will continue to recede, unless some drastic change takes place in the world situation as a whole.

This surely reinforces the call seriously to lay to heart the great danger that the Church is in, by reason of the challenge of the non-Christian religions, and to consider whether the missionary methods at present employed are really the best that lie within her power. In the next lecture we shall consider the answers that are now forthcoming from the Christian Church to the challenge from the non-Christian religions.

<sup>1</sup> In *I.R.M.* (April 1946), p. 307.



LECTURE II

THE ANSWERS FROM THE CHURCH TO-DAY



## LECTURE II

### THE ANSWERS FROM THE CHURCH TO-DAY

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In the present divided state of Christendom, it is impossible to single out any one pronouncement as containing an official reply from the Church as a whole to the challenges of other religions. But there are various sources from which it is possible to gather the general trends of Christian thought on this subject. In the Roman Catholic Church, papal bulls and encyclical letters are of high authority, even if not always free from ambiguity.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Anglican Communion, its 'mind' is broadly reflected in the resolutions of successive Lambeth Conferences.<sup>2</sup> Among the non-Roman Churches, the general trend of opinion may be judged from the reports of the many inter-denominational conferences held during the last fifty years.<sup>3</sup> Besides these, books and statements by individual Christians help us to observe the tendencies of present-day thought in the Church with regard to other religions.

#### I. THE ANSWER TO THE POLITICAL RELIGIONS

##### *A unanimous rejection of their claims to supreme authority*

We saw in the last lecture that the political religions, such as Communism, Fascism and Nationalism, while often at strife among themselves, and variable in their attitudes towards Christianity, always demand from other organizations the recognition of the supremacy of their own authority. To that demand, the Christian answer, from Catholic and Protestant, Conservative and Modernist alike, has invariably been an emphatic 'No!' Indeed, it is difficult

<sup>1</sup> For the authority of bulls and encyclicals, see the articles on these in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1907-14), vols. III and V respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Of 1867, 1878, 1888, 1897, 1908, 1921, 1930 and 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly the International Missionary Conferences, at Edinburgh, 1910; Jerusalem, 1928; Tambaram (Madras), 1938; Whitby (Canada), 1948; and the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, 1948.

to see how any society or individual that recognizes an authority other than Christ as supreme in matters of religion could possibly (except perhaps from motives of expediency) wish to retain the title of 'Christian'.

But along with this verbal unanimity, we find in practice a considerable measure of diversity in the attitudes taken by Christians towards the political religions. At one extreme, we have the total condemnation of Communism (and Socialism) by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1864, Pope Pius IX issued the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, in which he condemned as 'pests', 'Socialism, Communism, Bible Societies, and Clerico-Liberal Societies'.<sup>1</sup> In 1891, Pope Leo XIII followed this with the encyclical *De Rerum Novarum*, which denounced Socialism as 'robbery', and demanded that its tenets be 'utterly rejected by all Catholics'.<sup>2</sup> This still remains the official attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Socialism, and also towards Communism; for the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, in its articles on these two movements, states that 'no instructed and loyal Catholic would now claim or accept the title of Christian Socialist', and also that 'the theories condemned in *Rerum Novarum* under the name of "Socialism" certainly include Communism'.<sup>3</sup>

Many individual Roman Catholics, however, would probably wish to modify this wholesale condemnation. For example, Jacques Maritain says: 'Communism originates chiefly through the fault of a Christian world unfaithful to its own principles, in a profound sense of *resentment*, not only against the Christian world, but—and here lies the tragedy—against Christianity itself, which transcends the Christian world'.<sup>4</sup>

From the side of Protestant Fundamentalism, the denunciations of Communism are often as drastic as from the Vatican itself. In 1948, the Fundamentalist groups in America denounced the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, as being not only 'heretical'

<sup>1</sup> *Quanta Cura* (Eng. trans. London, 1875), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *De Rerum Novarum* (Eng. trans. Dublin, 1891), pp. 7, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1907-12), vol. iv, p. 183, and vol. xiv, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *True Humanism* (Eng. trans. London, 1938), p. 33. Another Roman Catholic, Daniel Rops, in *Communism and Christians* (ed. by D. F. Scantoni, London, 1938), takes a similar line.

but also 'communistic'.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, however, the non-Roman Churches seem prepared to make a distinction between the good and bad elements in Communism. For instance, the 1948 Lambeth Conference of bishops, while condemning the principles of Marxist Communism as 'contrary to the Christian Faith', also called upon Christian people to recognize that in it there are 'elements which are a true judgment on the existing social and economic order'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, while calling upon the Church to reject the ideologies of both *communism* and *laissez-faire* capitalism, urged that Christians 'should recognize the hand of God in the revolt against injustice which gives communism much of its strength', and make clear that there are also conflicts between Christianity and capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Some Christians are even prepared to maintain that in practice Communism is more truly 'Christian' than organized Christianity. Prof. John Macmurray, for instance, says:

If we put *profession* on one side, and consider only the *attitude of mind* which is expressed in the Communist way of life, we begin to wonder whether there is not something peculiarly religious about it, which is missing in the attitude which is generally characteristic of professedly Christian communities. . . . I cannot help feeling that Communism . . . has recovered that essential core of a real belief in God, which organized Christianity has in our day largely lost.<sup>4</sup>

But it should be noted that even here, Communism is submitted to the test of Christ, rather than Christ to the test of Communism: and this method in itself implies a rejection of the totalitarian claim of Communism to be the final and absolute authority.

### *Is this rejection effective and convincing?*

The Christian refusal to admit the totalitarian demands of the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Christian News-Letter*, no. 319, p. 7. For a 'Fundamentalist' attack on Communism, see Dan Gilbert, *The Red Terror & Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, U.S.A., 1944).

<sup>2</sup> Resolutions 25 and 26 of the Lambeth Conference, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> *Amsterdam Series*, 1948, vol. III, p. 96. The Amsterdam Conference was severely criticized for this by the capitalist Press in the U.S.A.; see *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. I, no. 3, p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> *Creative Society* (London, 1935), pp. 22 ff. In his *Clue to History* (London, 1938), he maintains that the intentions of Communism are the nearest approach to "the Christian intention" that the world has yet seen (p. 206).

political religions is thus practically unanimous. But is it effective or convincing? There are many (including not a few Christians) who feel that it is not; and for the following reasons:

(i) The rejection often seems to be based on policy rather than on principle. In many cases, the condemnation of totalitarianism by the Church does not appear to be based on the principle that totalitarianism is wrong in itself, but simply on grounds of expediency, because it is a rival which challenges the authority of the Church. Nothing, for instance (as we have just seen) could appear more uncompromising than the condemnation of Communism by the Church of Rome. But when other totalitarian systems, no less ruthless and 'absolutist', have shown themselves willing to support the Church, the Papal blessing upon them has been readily forthcoming. Take the case of Fascism. In 1929, after the *Concordat* between Mussolini and the Holy See, the Pope saluted *Il Duce*, the former atheist, as 'a man of God', and in 1932 he gave him the Papal blessing at St Peter's. Four years later, the Holy Father ordered the Italian clergy to celebrate the Fascist victory over Ethiopia with special services of thanksgiving in the Churches;<sup>1</sup> and in the same year (1936), during the Spanish Civil War, he anathematized the Republican forces as 'satanic', and blessed the Fascist armies of General Franco, who ornamented his guns with the emblem of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

The Orthodox Church in Russia has shown itself no less ready to come to terms with totalitarianism, when convenient. Ever since the invasion of Russia by Germany in 1941, not only has the Soviet Government (as we noted in the previous lecture) changed its policy towards the Church (without modifying its own atheistic and totalitarian principles), but the Church also has completely changed its attitude towards the Soviet. This is clearly shown in the *Manifesto* of the Moscow Patriarchate, issued in 1942.<sup>3</sup> In this, the Patriarch Sergius indignantly dismisses as 'mere fabrications' the allegations that the Church had ever been persecuted by the Soviet, and concentrates his anathemas on what he calls

<sup>1</sup> See F. A. Ridley, *The Papacy and Fascism* (London, 1937), pp. 195 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 231-3.

<sup>3</sup> Eng. trans., *The Truth about Religion in Russia*, by the Rev. E. N. C. Sargeant (London 1942). Cf. H. S. Leiper, *Christianity Today* (London, 1948), pp. 213-22.

'the Fascist hordes' of Germany, and (with almost equal severity) on the Orthodox Russian exiles in Europe who were protesting against his change of policy.<sup>1</sup> The whole tone of the *Manifesto* is that of one-sided 'war propaganda'. In Greece, however, and other countries outside Soviet control, the Orthodox Church is generally adopting a hostile attitude to Communism;<sup>2</sup> but whether in Greece or in Russia, it seems content to echo the prevalent political views of the government under which it lives. Thus both the Papal and Orthodox Church policies towards the political religions seem to be based on expediency rather than on principle.

What of the Protestant Churches? On the whole, they have shown greater consistency in this matter. In particular, the Confessional Church in Germany, and the Reformed Churches in the countries which suffered under Nazi oppression, have won the admiration of all lovers of liberty by their courageous resistance to the demands of the totalitarian state.<sup>3</sup> But in lands where the Church has escaped persecution, Christian manifestos (both Roman and non-Roman) on the claims of the political religions have done little more than echo current public opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the Church has often tried to meet the challenge of the totalitarian State, not by an affirmation of genuinely 'liberal' or 'democratic' principles, but by an ecclesiastical or theological totalitarianism which is in essence very similar to that of political totalitarianism. For example, Dr Raja B. Manikam, general secretary of the National Christian Council of India, wrote in 1941 an article in the *International Review of Missions*, entitled 'The Uncompromising Elements in Christianity'; and in this, after attributing the success of the political totalitarianisms to the 'fanatical fervour' with which their adherents hold to arbitrary dogmas, he urges his fellow-Christians to emulate this by emphasizing the 'absoluteness' of the Christian Faith, and by putting aside 'the distrust of dogma which is handicapping us [Christians] today'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sargeant, *op. cit.* pp. 5, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See H. S. Leiper, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-49.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the articles by A. Fjellbø of Norway and E. Schlunk of Germany, in the *Amsterdam Series* (1948), vol. i, pp. 89-106.

<sup>4</sup> Even the pronouncements of the Lambeth and Amsterdam Conferences of 1948 on the subject of Communism contain little that had not already been said by newspapers such as *The Times* or the *Spectator* of London.

<sup>5</sup> In *I.R.M.* (April, 1941), p. 312.

The same tendency is apparent in the German Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, in their method of opposition to Nazism.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes Christians have seemed ready even to welcome the political totalitarianisms, on the ground that they will help to destroy the historic non-Christian religions, and thereby clear the ground for the message of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

All this is raising in many minds the question whether the Church is really opposed to totalitarianism in principle, or only in so far as this challenges its own rival claims. There is indeed a certain affinity of spirit and method between the political totalitarianisms and the authoritarian types of Christianity, whether Roman Catholic, Neo-Orthodox or Fundamentalist. Archbishop William Temple realized this, when he wrote in 1943: 'I think that an authoritarian organization of religion is always bound to find itself lined up on the whole with authoritarian politics.'<sup>3</sup>

(ii) Another reason for the partial ineffectiveness of the Church's answer to the political religions lies in the realm of practice, rather than of theory. Undoubtedly, both the Church and the political religions have shown themselves capable in practice of producing genuine 'conversions' from self-centredness to unselfish service of others, and from carelessness to single-minded devotion to an ideal. But is it quite clear to an impartial observer that the Church is the *more* dynamic of the two? That is a hard question to answer; for moral and spiritual standards cannot be measured with a precise gauge. There is little question but that in practice, totalitarianism often produces better men and women than its materialistic principles would lead us to expect; and sometimes, better than the average Christian.<sup>4</sup> But what of the *average* moral and spiritual level? If it were quite evident that Christian men and women are, in general, finer personalities than the average Communist or Fascist, then the right of the Church to reject the claims of the totalitarian religions would be much more widely

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the articles by Karl Heim (Protestant) and Karl Adam (Catholic) in *Germany's New Religion* (London, 1937).

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Trimingham, in *The Triumph of God* (ed. by Max Warren, London, 1948) says: 'Many missionaries have regarded secularism as an ally, and have said rather cynically that their turn would come when secularism had broken down allegiance to Islam' (p. 261).

<sup>3</sup> *Life of William Temple*, by F. A. Iremonger (Oxford, 1948), p. 419.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 11 f.

## THE ANSWERS FROM THE CHURCH TO-DAY

recognized. But at present, there is widespread uncertainty in many minds on this point, even among Christians; and no purely theological reply will suffice to dispel this.

### 2. THE ANSWER TO THE NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

#### *To those which claim supremacy*

We have seen that some of the non-Christian religions, ancient and modern, are today putting forward claims to absolute supremacy and universality, very similar in essence to those of the political totalitarianisms;<sup>1</sup> and others, while admitting that they are not absolutely perfect, still maintain that they can offer alternatives to Christianity which are more satisfying to the moral and spiritual needs of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

To all such claims, the Christian answer is (and is indeed bound to be) a rejection, no less decisive than its rejection of the political totalitarianisms. For in this case, too, it would be impossible at one and the same time to admit that outside Christianity there exists a higher form of religion, and yet to cling to the title of 'Christian'. We need not therefore cite examples of the refusal by Christians to admit the superiority of any other type of religion; for this is universal and unanimous.

To give reasons for this refusal is one of the tasks of Christian apologetics; and these reasons must be substantiated in the realm of practice, as well as of theory. In other words, the Christian apologist must meet non-Christian claims, not only with theological or philosophical arguments, but also with evidence that Christianity does in fact produce on the whole better men and women than any other religion.

It is not, however, the immediate purpose of these lectures to attempt this apologetic task: though in the course of our study, we shall from time to time have occasion to note some of the evidence that bears upon this question. But we must now consider more fully the Church's answer to the other challenge—in this case, couched in less peremptory terms—that is being presented to us by the non-Christian religions today.

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 16 ff.

*Their invitation to inter-religious co-operation*

This invitation is (as we have seen)<sup>1</sup> even more widespread today than the challenge of hostility; and in this case the Christian response is by no means unanimous or uniform. This may be illustrated by a concrete example.

In India recently, two Christian missionaries were walking together along a road near to their mission-headquarters. Both of them were men of sincere conviction and earnest devotion. Suddenly they came in sight of a new building in course of construction; and a glance showed them that it was to be a Hindu temple. 'Ah!', said one of them, with a note of disgust, 'I hate to see that!—Another fortress of the enemy!' 'Well', said the second missionary, 'I'm not so sure! I would be rather inclined to say: Another witness to man's search for God—and *thank* God for it!'

Which of the two was right? Ought we, as Christians, to regard the non-Christian religions as enemies of the Gospel, or as our allies in the fight against evil? Let us consider some of the answers that are being given to-day in the name of Christ to their invitation to alliance. The first group may be called:

(i) *Answers of Refusal*. This group of answers, while differing in detail, are based on the conviction that it is impossible for Christians to regard the non-Christian religions as allies, or to join with them in any co-operative enterprise in the field of religion.

(a) 'Answers of War.' At one extreme are those which insist that the Christian religion must always be opposed to all other religions, and that its ultimate aim must be to destroy them entirely. Dr Hocking has called this 'the policy of Radical Displacement'.<sup>2</sup> In pursuit of this aim, various methods may be adopted. The missionary may be openly hostile, or outwardly courteous; he may deprecate the study of other religions as a waste of time, or he may encourage it as useful. But if he is polite, it is with the politeness of a diplomat dealing with a hostile foreign power. If he studies other religions (and some missionaries of this type have made notable contributions to scientific knowledge in this field), it is with a motive similar to that which prompts the commander

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 13-19.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (London, 1940), p. 143.

of an invading army to study carefully the nature of the country before him,— in order that he may conquer it the more quickly and effectively.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude was probably more prevalent a century ago than it is today; but it is still upheld by leading exponents of the Christian Faith. Within the last few decades, several vigorous affirmations of it have appeared in the pages of the *International Review of Missions*. In 1913, Dr Julius Richter, Professor of Missions in the University of Berlin, wrote: 'Wherever missionary enterprise comes into contact with non-Christian religions, it sets itself to oust them, and to put Christianity in their place.'<sup>2</sup> Dr Richter indeed maintains that the primary object of Christian apologetics should be 'not so much to defend Christianity, as to supplant heathenism'.<sup>3</sup>

Still more recently, Dr. Schlink, Professor of Missions at Tübingen, in an article entitled 'Theology and Missions,' has adopted an equally uncompromising attitude. He places Christianity in sharp contrast to all other religions, as 'Truth' against 'Falsehood':

On one side, stand God's words and acts; on the other, the daemonic impulse to picture God in one's own image. . . . Any attempt to make links with them would be to make links with lies and deception.<sup>4</sup>

If it is said that these are the views of German theologians, whose tendency always seems to be in the direction of an uncompromising 'either/or', we would point out that they are held also by some English Churchmen. For example, in 1917, the Rev. A. H. Bowman, formerly Diocesan Missioner in Calcutta, wrote: 'Christianity is never to be *compared* with any oriental religion; it is always to be *contrasted*'.<sup>5</sup> A still more recent Anglican book

<sup>1</sup> So T. S. Eliot, in *Revelation* (ed. J. Baillie and H. Martin, London, 1937). After maintaining that the division between Christian and non-Christian is 'the most profound division between human beings', he adds: 'Nevertheless, it is well for us to study the practices of the non-Christian world; for we shall not convert it unless we understand it' (p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> 'Missionary Apologetic', in *I.R.M.* (July 1913), p. 522.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 541.

<sup>4</sup> *I.R.M.* (July 1938), pp. 465, 470.

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Thought and Hindu Philosophy* (London, 1917), p. x. A similar point of view is taken by the Rev. H. Haigh (an ex-missionary) in his *Leading Ideas of Hinduism* (London, 1903): 'In Hindu philosophy, Christianity will find its subtlest, most alert, and most tenacious antagonist' (p. 6).

maintains that the primary purpose of the Christian missionary must be 'to abolish all other religions of the world'.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, although this note of hostility towards other religions became somewhat less pronounced in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth,<sup>2</sup> since the Tambaram Conference of 1938 it has become stronger again, not only among Western missionaries, but among leaders of Oriental Christian thought. For example, in 1940 Dr P. D. Devanandan (then Professor at the United Theological College, Bangalore), when reviewing Dr Sydney Cave's book, *Hinduism or Christianity?*, welcomed it specially for its 'uncompromisingly severe and refreshingly critical' attitude to Hinduism.<sup>3</sup>

A militant attitude towards other religions is also implicit in most of our popular missionary hymns, which (though they generally reflect ancient, rather than modern, theology), are sung today in churches of all denominations and all schools of thought.<sup>4</sup> Missionaries are 'sent to the front' to the refrain of military metaphors, and the summons to a holy war:

Ye armics of the living God,  
Sworn warriors of Christ's host, . . .  
Go to the conquest of all lands;  
All must be His at length!<sup>5</sup>

Bishop Heber's 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains' (perhaps the most popular of all missionary hymns), does not actually make use of military metaphors, but it assumes the 'war-attitude', inviting the Christian to contrast himself 'whose soul is lighted with wisdom from on high', with the heathen, who is 'benighted' and 'vile', and 'in his blindness bows down to wood and stone'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Shebbeare, *Christianity and other Religions* (London, 1939), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Even in 1910, however, the Edinburgh Missionary Conference appeared to an experienced observer (Dr H. Kraemer) to resemble an army viewing the non-Christian world 'as a world to be conquered' (*The Christian Message*, p. 36).

<sup>3</sup> *I.R.M.* (July 1940), p. 282. Cf. the article on Hinduism by Mr R. C. Das (a convert from Hinduism) in *I.R.M.* (April 1940), in which he says that the task of Christianity in Hindu India is 'to liquidate its strongholds', in the homes, in the temple and in the wayside shrine' (p. 203).

<sup>4</sup> There is much wisdom in a remark by the present Bishop of Southwell, Dr F. R. Barry: 'Let me choose the *hymns* for my people, and let who will teach them their theology!' (*The Relevance of the Church* [London, 1935], p. 150.)

<sup>5</sup> Hymn 586, A. and M., by Dr Montgomery (Moravian), 1771-1854.

<sup>6</sup> Hymn 358, A. and M.

In other hymns, the metaphor is piscatorial rather than military:

The fishermen of Jesus far away  
Seek in new waters an immortal prey.<sup>1</sup>

Here, too, the heathen are viewed simply as objects for capture and conquest by the Christian.

Such hymns help to create the impression, among both Christians and non-Christians, that the only recognized Christian attitude to the non-Christian religions is one of war and conquest, and that the only relation between them is one of antithesis or contrast. On such a basis, it is quite impossible to contemplate any favourable response to the invitation to co-operate with other religions.

Under the heading of 'answers of war', we should also include those replies which admit that in the non-Christian religions there are *some* elements of good, but maintain that these are so inadequate, or (it may be) so closely interwoven with error, that the Christian must seek to destroy completely the religious systems in which they are found, and to replace these by Christianity. Answers of this kind may range from an attitude of almost entire condemnation to one which contains a large amount of appreciation. The latter gradually merges into one which we shall be considering later, under the title of 'answers of comprehension'.<sup>2</sup> But from the non-Christian standpoint, any Christian policy which aims at the ultimate destruction of all other religious systems cannot but, be regarded as an 'answer of war'.

(b) 'Answers of Aloofness', or 'Discontinuity'. Of late, many leaders of Christian thought have been advocating an answer to the non-Christian religions which, although at first sight it may seem to be akin to the 'answers of war', is (at least according to its advocates) quite distinct from it. They maintain that the Christian Revelation is in its essence so entirely *different* from all other religions that there is, and can be, no point of contact between the one and the other. Their attitude therefore involves (equally with the 'war-attitude') a decisive refusal to respond to any invitation to inter-religious alliance or co-operation.

<sup>1</sup> Hymn 587, A. and M., by the Rev. S. J. Stone, author of 'The Church's One Foundation', and other well-known hymns.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 47-52.

This line of thought was brought before the leaders of the missionary movement with great ability at the Tambaran Conference in 1938, by Dr Hendrik Kraemer of Holland, who wrote, in preparation for the conference, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*.<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly one of the most penetrating studies of the relation between Christianity and other religions that has ever been written. Archbishop William Temple in his Foreword to it says: 'This volume is likely to remain for many years the classical treatment of its theme. . . . It will supply the principles of missionary policy for our generation.'<sup>2</sup> The book was supplemented by an important article by Dr Kraemer in the *Tambaran Reports*, vol. I, under the title of 'Continuity or Discontinuity?' in which he begins by saying: 'The main thesis of my book [*The Christian Message*] is that the Christian Revelation is . . . absolutely *sui generis*.'<sup>3</sup>

Kraemer follows Barth and Kirkegaard in maintaining that there is an 'absolute qualitative difference' between God and man, between the truth revealed in Christ and truths discovered by man, and (consequently) between the Gospel of Christ and all other religions; and he entitles this view 'Biblical Realism'.

The Christian Revelation [he writes], as contained in Biblical Realism, . . . places itself *over against* the many efforts [of man] to apprehend the totality of existence. . . . When Christianity as a total religious system approaches the non-Christian religions as total religious systems, there is only difference and antithesis.<sup>4</sup>

The relation between Christianity and other religions is therefore (as the title of his article implies) one of 'discontinuity', or 'otherness'; and this is so utter, that it is impossible to make any kind of comparison between Christianity and any other religion. 'There is no point of contact; . . . there are no bridges from human religious consciousness to Christ.'<sup>5</sup> The non-Christian religions are therefore quite irrelevant for the purpose of bringing to men any true knowledge of God, or of salvation, and we cannot contemplate the possibility of co-operating with them on any religious

<sup>1</sup> London, 1938; 2nd ed., London, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Foreword to *The Christian Message*, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> 'Continuity or Discontinuity?', p. 1 (hereinafter referred to as 'Continuity').

<sup>4</sup> *The Christian Message*, pp. 113, 300; cf. pp. 115-20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 131 f.

basis. But it is important to recognize that this insistence upon the 'absoluteness', 'finality', and 'otherness' of the Christian Revelation and of the Gospel does not mean that these qualities are ascribed to any one type of Christianity that exists in the world to-day. 'Empirical [i.e. historical] Christianity', says Dr Kraemer, 'stands under the judgment of the Revelation in Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

This is affirmed even more explicitly by another Continental scholar, who in many respects shares Dr Kraemer's views, Dr H. Frick of Marburg. In his book, *The Gospel, Christianity and other Faiths*,<sup>2</sup> he too insists on the utter difference between the Gospel and all other religions,—including Christianity as a historical religion. The Gospel, he says, 'falls from above, like a stone into water'; and he pictures the problem of religion as a 'triangular' one, in which the 'apex' is the Gospel, and the 'base' includes Christianity and the other faiths.<sup>3</sup> For 'the Gospel' he claims absolute finality; but not for 'Christianity'. 'Not only does Christianity share in the inadequacy of other faiths; but it has to face a special condemnation; for through its own fault it has made unbelievable the preaching of the Gospel.'<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Dr Frick uses the figure of a circle, in which 'the Gospel' is the centre, and around the circumference are all the religions, including Christianity; but from Christianity (and from Christianity alone) a 'radius' extends to the centre.<sup>5</sup> This illustration suggests that Christianity does stand in a uniquely close relation to the Gospel. Dr Frick's theory is interesting and suggestive; but both he and Dr Kraemer leave us wondering what is the 'absolute' element in 'the Gospel', and how it can be made known to our human minds in its 'absoluteness'. It seems to be as indefinable and elusive as Barth's conception of 'the Word of God'.

It is also important to bear in mind that the exponents of

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 145. Kirkegaard says: 'Conversion means that God has broken all continuity in man's life, and called into being a new personality'; and Barth maintains that the Gospel has to be proclaimed 'in a religious void' (both quoted by N. Macnicol, *Is Christianity Unique?* [London, 1936], p. 170).

<sup>2</sup> Eng. trans., Oxford, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Frick, *op. cit.* p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

'discontinuity' insist vigorously that their view does not involve condemnation of, or contempt for, the non-Christian religions. For example, Dr Hartenstein of the Basel Mission, who is in general a follower of Barth and Kraemer, says: 'It is *absolutely wrong* to think in terms of the old orthodoxy, which has always tried to speak about Christianity as the source of light, and the [other] religions as the world of darkness.'<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Dr Hartenstein maintains that the Gospel comes to all non-Christians as 'a message to leave the burning house of their ancestors, and as an uncompromising "No!" to the totality of their former existence'.<sup>2</sup> Dr Kraemer, too, endorses Barth's description of the non-Christian religions as '*Unglaube*' ('Unfaith')—'not acts of response to God, but acts of resistance to God'<sup>3</sup>—in which case, as Barth himself has said, 'non-Christians can be nothing but foes', in the eyes of Christians.<sup>4</sup>

All this makes it very difficult for the English reader to accept the assurance that 'Biblical Realism' involves no condemnation of other religions. Perhaps we must content ourselves with the recollection that the 'dialectical method' which these Continental theologians follow involves (as Dr Kraemer himself admits) saying 'Yes' and 'No' at the same time to life's great questions.<sup>5</sup>

Dr Kraemer's learning and eloquence, fortified by archiepiscopal blessings, won for his views a cordial reception at the Tambaran Conference, both among foreign missionaries and among leaders of the younger Churches;<sup>6</sup> and since then, the 'theory of discontinuity' has contributed to the increasing emphasis on the unchangeable 'given-ness' of Christian dogma, and the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Dr Kraemer's views have been criticized by

<sup>1</sup> *Tambaran Report*, 1938, vol. I, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> 'Continuity', p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> In *Questions to Christendom*, 1928; quoted by N. Macnicol in *Is Christianity Unique?* p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> See the papers read at the Tambaran Conference by T. C. Chao of China and D. G. Moses of India (Report, vol. I, pp. 24-88).

<sup>7</sup> See the papers read at the Whitby (Canada) Conference, 1947; especially by Dr J. Baillie, on 'The Given Word'. Cf. also the article by the Rev. (now Bishop) S. Kulendran of Jaffna (Ceylon) in *I.R.M.* (Oct. 1944), pp. 390 ff. on 'Theology and the Evangelization of Hindus'.

theologians,<sup>1</sup> missionaries,<sup>2</sup> and Oriental Christians;<sup>3</sup> and Dr Kraemer himself admitted that even at the Tambaram Conference there had been 'appallingly small' progress towards a general acceptance of his views.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in his Preface to the second edition of his book (1948), he reaffirms his adherence to its main principles.

The 'answer of aloofness', based on the theory of discontinuity, must therefore be reckoned as one of the main types of answer now forthcoming from the Christian Church to the non-Christian religions. But many Christians will challenge its right to the title of 'Biblical Realism', holding that it is true neither to the Bible as a whole, nor to the real facts of life.<sup>5</sup>

(c) 'Answers of Comprehension and Fulfilment.' There are many Christians today who are not content to meet the invitation to inter-religious co-operation either with the flat refusal of the answers of war, or with the aloofness of the theory of discontinuity; and they are asking whether there may not be another possible Christian answer.

One such answer maintains that Christianity 'comprehends' and 'fulfils' all the partial truths that are to be found in other religions, while at the same time purging them from their errors, and supplementing them with truths and values that they do not in themselves possess. In them, we see 'broken lights'; in Christianity, the full radiance of God's glory.

Now this answer appeals strongly to many Christian minds. It offers a way of approach to non-Christians that is more courteous and less provocative than the answers of war or of aloofness. It relieves the Christian from the painful necessity of pronouncing wholesale condemnation on systems of religious belief and practice.

<sup>1</sup> Dr D. S. Cairns, reviewing Dr Kraemer's book in *I.R.M.* (January 1939), says: 'It is not possible to explain the plain facts of the history of religion in terms of Dr Kraemer's theory' (p. 127). Dr C. J. Cadoux, in *Evangelical Modernism* (London, 1938) maintains that the 'neo-orthodoxy' of Dr Kraemer and his followers is not really orthodox at all (pp. 41, 48).

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Leslie Wenger, formerly a missionary in Bengal, holds that Dr Kraemer 'leads us in a circle, and evades the problem' (*Studies in History and Religion*, ed. E. A. Payne [London, 1942], p. 163).

<sup>3</sup> P. Chenchiah has subjected Dr Kraemer's book to a searching criticism, which forms the Appendix (pp. 1-52) to *Re-Thinking Christianity in India* (Madras, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> 'Continuity', p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 152 ff.

which contain much that appears to be unquestionably admirable. It opens the door for joining with non-Christians in discussion, as well as in common social service. It encourages the study of other religions, not only with a view to criticize them and to learn how to destroy them more quickly, but with the expectation of finding in them things good and true.

At the same time it affirms with undiminished confidence that Christianity is the one and only perfect religion for the whole of mankind; and hence it is bound (no less than the 'answers of war and of aloofness') to meet the appeal for mutual inter-religious co-operation with refusal. It may admit that individual Christians, and perhaps even sectional Churches, are defective in their understanding of Christ, and that this knowledge may possibly be enriched by contact with other faiths. But it insists firmly that the latter cannot contribute anything fresh or distinctive to 'the truth as it is in Jesus', or to 'the faith once for all delivered to the saints'. If there is to be any 'sharing', it can be only 'one way'.<sup>1</sup> It would say of Christianity as Cowper said of the Bible:

It gives a light to every age;  
It gives, but borrows none.

This view of Christianity, as the 'fulfilment' of all that is best in other religions, has been upheld by a long succession of Christian thinkers.<sup>2</sup> It is specially congenial to the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, where it is based upon the doctrine of 'analogy' between the human and divine.<sup>3</sup> In orthodox Protestantism, it has not been so readily welcomed, and sometimes it has been expressly denied.

In the Anglican Church, it was brought to the fore in the early years of the present century, particularly through a volume of essays, edited by Bishop H. H. Montgomery of the S.P.G., and all written by bishops, under the title of *Mankind and the Church*.<sup>4</sup> The main thesis of this book was that the non-Christian religions

<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Phillips, in *The Gospel in the World* (London, 1939), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 120-8.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Fr. Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission Theory* (Techy, Ill. U.S.A., 1931); or Père Charles, *The Theology of Missions* (Eng. trans. London, 1942). See also below, pp. 153 ff.

<sup>4</sup> London, 1907.

are not to be regarded as wholly, or even predominantly, false; but that, on the contrary, God has given to each of them a distinctive apprehension of some aspect of truth, with the purpose that they should eventually bring this as a contribution to the fullness of truth in the Holy Catholic Church of the future. The writers make this claim not only for the higher religions—Hinduism, Islam, etc.<sup>1</sup>—but also for the more primitive religions, such as those of the Negro or the Papuan.<sup>2</sup> In this way, they combine a large-hearted sympathy towards men of all races and faiths with an uncompromising faith in the Divine authority of the Church.

A few years later, Dr J. N. Farquhar, a missionary in India, endeavoured, in his book *The Crown of Hinduism*, to apply this 'theory of fulfilment' to the relation between Christianity and Hinduism. After examining in detail the beliefs and practices of the Hindus, he concludes: 'Christ provides the fulfilment of the highest aspirations of Hinduism. . . . He is the Crown of the Faith of India.'<sup>3</sup>

At the Jerusalem Missionary Conference, 1928, one of the most revered missionaries in India, Dr N. Macnicol, expressed a similar idea, saying: 'Christ is no stranger to Hinduism'.<sup>4</sup> More recently, this theme has been worked out in fuller detail by a group of Indian Christian writers, under the leadership of Archdeacon (now Bishop) A. J. Appasamy, in a series of small books,<sup>5</sup> culminating in 1942 in his own work, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, of which the main theme is, 'that whatever is true and good and noble in Hinduism can be used by the Christian, and made a living part of his religious experience'.<sup>6</sup>

Some Christian writers and missionaries have also maintained that Christianity may be regarded as 'the Crown of Buddhism'; among them Dr Kenneth J. Saunders, a colleague of Dr Farquhar,<sup>7</sup> and Dr Reichelt, in his Christian monastery of Tao Fong Shan

<sup>1</sup> Chs. v and vi.

<sup>2</sup> Chs. i and ii.

<sup>3</sup> *The Crown of Hinduism* (London, 1912), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Jerusalem Conference Report, vol. i, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Christianity as Bhakti Marga, and What is Moksa?* (1931); *Jesus the Avatar, and The Cross and Indian Thought* (1932); all published in Madras.

<sup>6</sup> P. 21.

<sup>7</sup> See K. J. Saunders, *Ideals of East and West* (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 219-24.

in China;<sup>1</sup> and also the great Roman Catholic scholar, Baron Von Hugel.<sup>2</sup>

It is more difficult to see how Christianity can be regarded as 'the Crown of Islam'; for Islam is later in date than Christianity, and at certain points expressly denies some essential principles of the Christian Faith. Yet even this has been maintained by a few Christian writers.<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion that Christianity is the fulfilment and completion of the best elements in other religions met at first with considerable criticism in missionary circles.<sup>4</sup> But gradually it won its way to widespread acceptance, and for some years it came to be regarded as the most 'orthodox' view of the relation between Christianity and other faiths.<sup>5</sup> It was expressly endorsed by the majority of the contributors to *Essays Catholic and Missionary*, in 1928, particularly by Miss Evelyn Underhill and Bishop Lucas of Masasi; and in the same volume, the Rev. H. A. Jones of the S.P.G. maintains that in this policy "not to destroy, but to fulfil", Catholicism is nearer to Christ than Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> In 1930, the Lambeth Conference, through its Committee on the Christian Doctrine of God, affirmed: 'We gladly acknowledge the truths contained and emphasized in the great religions; but . . . each of them is less than the Gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ. The majesty of God in Islam, the high moral standards and profound truth in other Eastern religions, are approaches to the truth of God revealed in Christ.'<sup>7</sup>

Now so far as concerns the relation of Christianity to Judaism,

<sup>1</sup> See the Jerusalem Conference Report, vol. I, pp. 163-6.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Mcleod Campbell, *Christian History in the Making* (London, 1946), pp. 269 f.

<sup>3</sup> It is definitely advocated in *I.R.M.* (January 1942) by the Rev. J. S. Enderlin of the Basel Mission in Egypt, in his article 'The Old Way and the New to the Muslim Heart' (pp. 112 ff.), also by Bishop Wilson Cash of Worcester, in his *Christendom and Islam* (London, 1937), esp. pp. 175-87. But such views are contrary to those held by the majority of missionaries to Muslims; see, e.g., the Edinburgh Conference Report (1910), vol. IV, pp. 140 f.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Dr Mackichan's review of *The Crown of Hinduism*, in *I.R.M.* (April 1914), in which he says it is 'misleading' to non-Christians.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., St Clair Tisdall, *Christianity and Other Faiths* (London, 1912), p. 202; or Roland Allen, *Missionary Principles* (London, 1912) p. 94, or J. S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress* (Edinburgh, 1897); and also the *Reports* of the Missionary Conferences, Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), and La Zoute (1926).

<sup>6</sup> *Essays Catholic and Missionary* (London, 1928), p. 73; cf. pp. 4 ff., 128 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Lambeth Report* (1930), p. 75.

the theory of fulfilment has substantiated its claim beyond reasonable doubt. According to St Matthew, this was expressly affirmed by Jesus Christ himself: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets; I came, not to destroy, but to fulfil.'<sup>1</sup>

But with regard to the religions outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the idea that they are 'fulfilled' in Christianity has of late been meeting with increasing criticism. At Tambaram, Dr Kraemer described it as 'abhorrent';<sup>2</sup> and Dr Alfred Hogg, Principal of the Madras Christian College, while admitting that the Gospel fulfils the highest aspirations of *individual* non-Christian souls, decisively rejected the theory that the non-Christian religious *systems* find their fulfilment in Christianity.<sup>3</sup> It has also been pointed out that the theory of fulfilment tends to ignore the fundamental differences of spirit and 'ethos' that distinguish the great non-Christian religions from each other, as well as from Christianity. To look for the 'fulfilment' of Buddhism or Islam in Christianity is as unscientific as to look for the 'fulfilment' of a rose-bud in the full-blown flower of an orchid. In large measure, the great non-Christian religions are 'all-inclusive systems and theories of life',<sup>4</sup> each with its own distinctive quality; and no one of them can be 'included' in any of the others.

Nor has this theory succeeded in winning the approval of the spokesmen of other faiths; for in spite of its conciliatory tone, its attitude seems to them to savour of patronage and condescension.<sup>5</sup> They realize that its ultimate purpose is unquestionably to destroy, or at least absorb, all other systems of religion; and they regard it as a smooth-spoken but subtle invitation to the 'heathen fly' to walk into the parlour of the 'Christian spider'.<sup>6</sup> In short, the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 17; cf. Matt. iii. 15; Mark x. 19, xii. 28-31; Luke xi. 42; also Rom. xiii. 8; Gal. v. 14. See also below, pp. 77, 82.

<sup>2</sup> 'Continuity', p. 5. The utmost that Dr Kraemer will admit is that in Christianity there is a 'subversive fulfilment' of other religions—whatever that may mean.

<sup>3</sup> *Tambaram Report*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 100-9. <sup>4</sup> Kraemer, *The Christian Message*, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> See A. G. Hogg in *I.R.M.* (1914), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> The *Religious Quest of India* series of books, edited at first by Dr J N. Farquhar, and afterwards by the present writer, were designed to illustrate the 'fulfilment' of Indian religious ideals in Christianity, and to show appreciation of all their good qualities. But Radhakrishnan, commenting on these books, complains that 'there is, right through, the imperialistic note, that Christianity is the highest manifestation of the religious spirit' (*East and West in Religion* [London, 1933], p. 24).

'answer of comprehension', though still widely prevalent among missionaries and their supporters, no longer holds the same position of pre-eminence that it held a few years ago.

(ii) *Answers of Co-operation.* So far, none of the answers from the Christian Church that we have been considering offers a real response of the kind that is desired by those non-Christians who invite Christians to join with them in inter-religious co-operation, and in the search for God. Must we then conclude that there is no such response from any Christian quarter?

There are certainly not many signs of this today; and none at all from the official leaders of any Church. Such a response would involve the admission that Christianity, as we know it, must be prepared to learn and receive, as well as to teach and to give, and that consequently it is not adequate, in its present form, to be the final World-Religion. Few Church-leaders—at least in the West—would be prepared to make these admissions.

It is evident, however, that there are some Christians today who would welcome inter-religious co-operation on that basis. Dr W. E. Hocking of Harvard holds that 'our present Christianity does not include all that other religions have', and that it *needs* the contributions which other religions can give.<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer, too, while recognizing the 'unbridged abyss' which at present separates Eastern and Western modes of thought,<sup>2</sup> writes, from the point of view of one who is both philosopher and missionary:

Western and Indian philosophies must not contend, in the spirit that aims at the one proving itself right in opposition to the other. Both must be moving towards a way of thinking which shall . . . eventually be shared in common by all mankind.<sup>3</sup>

In the past, this view has very rarely been expressed by missionaries themselves. But in 1910, at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the Rev. W. Shedd (an American Presbyterian missionary) urged that Christians ought to be 'ready to learn from Orientals truths which we have not apprehended', and quoted with approval Max

<sup>1</sup> *Living Religions and a World Faith* (London, 1940), p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> *Albert Schweitzer*, by George Seaver (London, 1947), p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 255.

Müller's view that 'other religions are languages in which God has spoken to man'.<sup>1</sup>

Two decades later, Dr Rufus Jones, of the Society of Friends, made this appeal to the delegates to the Jerusalem Missionary Conference of 1928: 'Go to Jerusalem . . . as those who find in the other religions (which Secularism attacks, as it attacks Christianity) witnesses of man's need of God, and allies in our quest of perfection'.<sup>2</sup> Dr K. J. Saunders, too, at Jerusalem suggested that Buddhism could bring to the Church 'wonderful treasures'.<sup>3</sup>

Neither the Edinburgh nor the Jerusalem Conferences, however, officially endorsed such views. But among Christian laymen of liberal outlook, the desire for inter-religious co-operation persisted; and in 1932 it received notable support in a volume published under the title *Re-Thinking Missions*, which contained the Report of a Laymen's Commission, appointed from North America (U.S.A. and Canada) to inquire into the working of Christian Missions in the Orient. This Report, endorsed by lay members of nearly all the larger non-Roman denominations, while reaffirming strongly the permanent obligation upon the Church to continue and extend Christian Missions to non-Christians,<sup>4</sup> criticized severely the methods at present being followed, and urged a radical reconsideration of the fundamental principles of missionary aims and policy. In place of the old ideal of world-dominion and the destruction of all other faiths, it suggested that the aim of the Christian missionary should be 'to seek, with people of other lands, a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Christ, and endeavouring to give effect to his spirit in the life of the world'.<sup>5</sup> The missionary is advised to regard sincere and good men and women of other faiths as 'fellow-workers' and fellow-disciples of Christ, 'in the wider Christian fellowship', even though they may not be members of the Christian Church.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh Report, 1910, vol. iv, pp. 139 f.

<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem Report, vol. i, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119; cf. Wall's article in *I.R.M.* (Jan. 1947), p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Re-thinking Missions* (New York, 1932), pp. 3 f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 327. A similar view is put forward by Oscar Buck, *Christianity Tested*, p. 112.

Now this is just the kind of response that is desired by those spokesmen of other faiths who are inviting the Church to co-operate with them. *Re-Thinking Missions* was, however, condemned by nearly all Church-leaders, and by the majority of supporters of Missions; and since its publication, the general trend of missionary opinion has turned in quite other directions. Hence, little or nothing has been done to carry its suggestions into effect, either on the mission-field or in the 'sending' countries.

Another expression of co-operation may be seen in the work of the International Fellowship and the Inter-Religious Student-Fellowship in India. The former was inaugurated in 1922, and the latter a few years later, with a view to providing opportunities for discussion and practical co-operation between members of different faiths, not merely on the plane of social intercourse, but in an atmosphere of religious faith, sharing in each other's forms of worship. For a time, these Fellowships enlisted a good deal of Christian support;<sup>1</sup> but gradually the Christian members seemed to find their position increasingly difficult to maintain, particularly at the time when Mahatma Gandhi was trying to persuade the International Fellowship to condemn all conversions from one religion to another, and to accept the dogma that all religions are equal.<sup>2</sup> For once, however, Mr Gandhi's persuasive powers proved unsuccessful; and of late, the International Fellowship in India has been showing marked signs of revival, on a less dogmatic basis. A recent statement by its general secretary states that it does not seek to establish 'a form of eclecticism', nor is it 'an attempt to evolve a Universal Religion'; but he defines its aim as 'the enrichment of life, both individual and corporate', in the faith 'that God has been and is leading peoples and nations on, through diverse paths, . . . and that through their varied heritages, He is preparing His children for fulness of life'.<sup>3</sup>

Similar ideals have inspired the World Congress of Faiths, which met in England in 1936, 1937 and 1938, and in Paris in 1939. It is based on the principle of genuine co-operation; not laying

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the *Report* of the Ennore Retreat in 1923 and the *Report* of the work of the Fellowship in 1936; both published in Madras.

<sup>2</sup> See M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions* (Ahmedabad, 1941), pp. 188-94.

<sup>3</sup> *The International Fellowship*, vol. xix, no. 1 (November 1947).

down the dogma that 'one religion is as good as another', nor yet attempting to find 'the lowest common denominator' of them all; but emphasizing 'the need of the whole for the part, and the part for the whole'.<sup>1</sup> The Congress has received the support of some distinguished Christian leaders; among them Deans W. R. Matthews of London and Hewlett Johnson of Canterbury, Dr Lindsay of Balliol, Dr C. E. Raven of Cambridge, Dr J. S. Whale, Canon Dick Sheppard, Dr Maude Royden and Dame Elizabeth Cadbury.<sup>2</sup> Several of those have given wholehearted approval to the principle of inter-religious co-operation. Two notable utterances were those of Dr Alec Fraser, formerly principal of Trinity College (C.M.S.), Kandy, Ceylon, and of Dr Berdyaev of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Dr Fraser said: 'I have been a missionary, and I would be a missionary again: but our business is not to conquer, but to contribute.'<sup>3</sup> And Dr Berdyaev: 'Christians may very well recognize that the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Jew, the Moslem, the free-thinking Spiritualist, if they strive after God, the spiritual life, truth and goodness, may be much nearer to God and Christ than the outward adepts of Christianity.'<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, not a single bishop expressed any approval of the Congresses; and the chairman of the 1938 Congress said in his opening address: 'The hostility of Christian leaders towards the Congress came to me as shock.'<sup>5</sup>

It seems, therefore, that inter-religious co-operation on the basis of mutual contribution has so far failed to enlist the support of the official leaders of the Church. Co-operation in social service is, however, regarded with some measure of approval. For example, the Council of Jews and Christians, founded in 1923, has secured as its patrons the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and of the Free Church Federal Council, and the Chief Rabbi. This is because it confines its activities to promoting

<sup>1</sup> *Faiths and Fellowship* (Report of the World Congress of Faiths, 1936), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See the Reports of the three Congresses; also Sir F. Younghusband. *A Venture of Faith* (London, 1937), p. 35. Cf. also the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, in 1893 (Report, ed. by Dr J. H. Barrow).

<sup>3</sup> *Faiths and Fellowship*, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> Sir F. Younghusband, *The Renascence of Religion* (London, 1938), p. xi.

goodwill and good works, and avoids theological discussions and compromises.<sup>1</sup>

Of late, a reaction against inter-religious co-operation is evident in many quarters. If we compare the resolutions of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 with those of the Tambaram Conference of 1938, we shall observe that while at 'Jerusalem' many of the speakers regarded Secularism as the greatest danger, and were inclined to urge the co-operation of all religions to meet this common enemy,<sup>2</sup> 'Tambaram' considered that the greatest danger comes from the revival of the non-Christian religions, and insisted that it is the duty of the Christian missionary to 'call men out from these'—a policy which can hardly be reconciled with real co-operation.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in spite of this reaction against inter-religious co-operation, there are today undoubtedly many individual Christians, some of considerable eminence, who believe that it is a right and Christian policy. Meanwhile, it has not been expressly condemned by any of the larger Christian bodies; and the door remains open for further experiments.

### 3. THE MOTIVES BEHIND THE ANSWERS

It is comparatively easy to analyse and classify the answers given in the name of the Church, in some such way as we have done, on the basis of their contents. But behind this or any similar classification lies a deeper division, often 'cutting across' the more obvious lines of demarcation. This is a division of *motive* and *spirit*; harder to determine, yet more fundamental. Any attempt to classify Christian attitudes thus will result in a grouping quite different from that of the four types of answer that we have set forth above. It will place on the one hand all those who are moved by the love of God and their fellow-men, or by the desire to obey God's will as revealed in Christ; and on the other hand all those whose real

<sup>1</sup> The scope of its work is reflected in its organ, *The Common Ground*.

<sup>2</sup> *Jerusalem Report*, vol. I, pp. 358-63; (especially the speeches by T. C. Chao and Dr J. McKenzie).

<sup>3</sup> *Tambaram Report*, vol. I, p. 200. Dr Reichelt of China, pleading at Tambaram for the policy of co-operation, said that he felt himself to be 'a voice crying in the wilderness' (*Ibid.* p. 90).

motives are those of self-interest and quarrelsomeness, or slackness and indifference. Each of these two types of motive may produce diverse practical results, according to the theology from which it springs; and conversely, the same policy may spring from more than one motive.

For example, a rigid refusal to compromise may spring either from stubborn narrow-mindedness, or from genuine loyalty to principles conscientiously believed to be true; while the motive behind a 'liberal' policy may be either a sincere love of truth and goodness, wherever found, or a lazy indifference to moral issues, or (it may be) a desire for popularity and a fear of incurring opposition.

Again, missionary practices which appear to be totally opposed to each other may in fact spring from the same motive. The wholesale baptisms performed by St Augustine of Canterbury or St Francis Xavier<sup>1</sup>, and the social service programme of Kagawa of Japan,<sup>2</sup> seem to follow two completely different methods, and to have in view two widely different aims. Yet each of these has been motivated by a pure Christian love of souls, and they adopt different lines of action simply because of the differing theological principles from which each starts.

So too, when we observe in one and the same missionary a fierce hostility towards other religions in the abstract, and a tender affection towards individual non-Christians, we should recognize that the same motive may underlie both attitudes. It is just because of a real 'concern' for the welfare of souls, that systems which are believed to be inimical to them are so strenuously attacked.

In one respect, the present-day answers to other religions have to be related to a situation to which there has been no parallel in the past. This situation consists of a world more closely knit together into a unity than ever before in the history of mankind, by rapid inter-communications, and close mutual dependence—though not by any means by unity of spirit and ideals. Within this unified world, the Church in almost every land now finds

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine is reported by Bede to have baptized 10,000 persons on Christmas Day, A.D. 597 (H. Deanesley, *History of the Mediaeval Church*, p. 44); and Xavier claimed that he had baptized 10,000 in India in one month (Hastings E.R.E., vol. xii, p. 824 b).

<sup>2</sup> Dr Kraemer, while condemning Kagawa's Social Gospel as 'a mistake', generously adds: 'but it is the mistake of a great soul' (*The Christian Message*, p. 395).

itself a minority-community, *vis-à-vis* a public opinion and a culture which is broadly, and increasingly, non-Christian. In Dr Kraemer's book, the title itself (*The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*) suggests the new world-situation. It reminds us that today the Christian message has to be proclaimed, not to 'the non-Christian world' (in the old sense of a geographical area outside 'Christendom'), but to *a world which, as a whole, is predominantly non-Christian, in East and West alike*;—though, no doubt, in lands traditionally 'Christian' there remains a large measure of Christian thought and tradition, often unrecognized as such.

In this chapter we have endeavoured simply to describe some of the answers to other religions that are forthcoming from the Church today, without attempting to discuss their value or their truth. In our concluding lectures (v and vi), we shall make some attempt at such an appraisal. Our survey in this chapter will have warned us not to be hasty in either condemning or commanding any religion, till we have made some effort to understand its motive and spirit, as well as its outward forms; and also not to imagine that we can form any comparative estimate of the value of a religion, without some agreed theological standard by which it can be measured.

For Christians, that standard must be found in the person and message of Jesus Christ. Therefore, before proceeding to attempt any 'valuation' of other religions, we shall devote our next two lectures to a study of the records of Christ's life and teaching, and to the interpretation of these in the tradition of the Christian Church.

LECTURE III

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST, IN  
RELATION TO OTHER RELIGIONS



### LECTURE III

## THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST, IN RELATION TO OTHER RELIGIONS

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At the close of the last lecture, we observed that before attempting to assess the values of the answers which are being given by the Church to the non-Christian religions, it is necessary to have some agreed standard by which to judge them. Probably all Christians will agree that the ultimate standard cannot be other than 'Jesus Christ'.<sup>1</sup> But this verbal agreement may cover wide divergences as to the actual meaning of this statement, and how much it involves by way of inevitable corollary.<sup>2</sup> In these lectures, our argument is based on two main assumptions:

(a) that it is possible, by methods of scientific historical research, to ascertain broadly what was the substance of the message proclaimed on earth by Jesus Christ; (b) that this message is God's supreme 'Word' to mankind; and that, if translated into terms intelligible and relevant to our own day, it provides us with a norm and a spirit by which the truth and value of other religious beliefs may be tested. These assumptions are being challenged to-day, both by those who hold that the Gospels fail to give us any reliable picture of Jesus, and also by those who maintain that the historical Jesus offers no basis for the Christian Faith.<sup>3</sup>

We may quite rightly be asked to justify these assumptions by valid arguments; but to embark now upon these would carry us into realms of philosophy and theology beyond the scope of these lectures. We therefore simply note here that it is from the above point of view that we shall be approaching the subject.

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 33 f., 39.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 136 f., 143-59.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 73-5.

## THE HEBREW BACKGROUND OF CHRIST'S MESSAGE

In studying the message of any great teacher, it is important to observe not only what he taught, but also the relation of this to the tradition which he inherited. For the most significant elements of his message are not those in which he simply echoes current ideas, but those in which he expresses a deliberate and independent judgment upon them. So if we would understand clearly the significance of the message of Jesus Christ, we must study this in relation to his ancestral Hebrew tradition, noting both what he accepted and what he rejected in this, and also what new elements he added to it. For Jesus did not live or teach in a vacuum. The tradition of his forefathers provided the language and thought-forms in which his mind developed, and through which his message was delivered. 'Jesus became not only a real man, but in particular a real Jew of that age.' So wrote a great Christian theologian, twenty years ago;<sup>1</sup> and today the same view is maintained by one who is recognized as a leader both of missionary strategy and of theological orthodoxy: 'Jesus Christ, in whom God revealed Himself decisively, is in his human thinking and feeling altogether a child of Israel.'<sup>2</sup> It seems necessary to emphasize this, because sometimes those who have laid special stress upon the universality and divinity of Jesus Christ have tended to picture his humanity as something quite different from *our* humanity—a quality abstract rather than particular.<sup>3</sup> But is it not always through the 'particular' that the 'universal' is made known to us? Let us then, before beginning to study the records of Christ's life and teaching in the New Testament, consider briefly the historical Jewish background of his life.

*The Old Testament attitude to other religions*

It is not necessary for our purpose to discuss such questions as the

<sup>1</sup> F. C. Burkitt, in *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London, 1929), p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Dr H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message*, p. 226. Very similar is the view of an eminent Scottish missionary, Dr A. G. Hogg, for many years Principal of Madras Christian College: 'In the high counsels of Heaven, it was possible to let Him [Jesus] be born a Jew' (*The Christian Message to the Hindu* [London, 1947], p. 15.)

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, in Liddon's Bampton Lectures, 1866, on *The Divinity of Our Lord*.

origin of the Hebrew religion,<sup>1</sup> or the dates of the books of the Old Testament, or the historical accuracy of this or that incident or text. It is, however, relevant for us to note the main characteristics of the Old Testament attitude to other religions. For the Old Testament as a whole was regarded by the Jews in the time of Christ as the Sacred Book which contained God's Word to his people; and it was doubtless taught to Jesus as such, in school and at home. What then are the main features of the Old Testament attitude?

(i) *The note of hostility to other religions.* This is undoubtedly the predominant note in the attitude of the Hebrews, throughout their history, towards the heathen religions with which they were surrounded.<sup>2</sup> It goes back to early times, when the Children of Israel were constantly at war with other tribes, and both they and their enemies invoked their respective tribal gods to help them in battle. The war-cry of Moses, as he led the children of Israel, was: 'Rise up, Jahveh! Let thine enemies be scattered!'<sup>3</sup> At that stage, Jahveh, the God of the Hebrews, was always at war with other gods. He was the enemy both of the ancient gods of Egypt,<sup>4</sup> and also of the more primitive deities of the tribes inhabiting Canaan. Towards the latter, his attitude was ruthlessly fierce; and his commands to Israel, on the threshold of Canaan, are given in Deuteronomy in these terms:

When Jahveh your God puts them [the heathen] into your hands, you must exterminate them, making no compact with them, and shewing no mercy. . . . Demolish their altars, break their obelisks, cut down their sacred poles, and burn up their idols!<sup>5</sup>

It is important, however, to bear in mind that among primitive peoples, though a war inevitably involved the gods of both sides in hostilities, this did not necessarily imply that either side claimed for its god or its religion a superiority over the other in moral standards or in abstract truth. Wars were then simply an integral

<sup>1</sup> For the beginnings of religion, see, e.g., E. O. James, *The Origins of Religion* (London, 1937); for the history of Hebrew religion, Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion* (London, 1930); for more recent trends of O.T. criticism, H. R. Willoughby, *The Bible to-day and to-morrow* (Chicago, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> There are some notable exceptions to this; but they are the exception rather than the rule. See below, pp. 65 f.

<sup>4</sup> Exod. xii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Numb. x. 35. Cf. Ps. lxviii. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. vii. 2, 5 (Moffatt).

part of tribal life as a whole, with its constant struggle for survival and supremacy.

Indeed, in the realm of abstract philosophic truth, a claim to supremacy was never characteristic of Hebrew religion. The Hebrews generally 'took God for granted', and the reality of his existence as a living person seemed to them too obvious to need the support of any arguments.

In the realm of morals, however, the Hebrews did begin, at quite an early stage, to maintain that Jahveh their God was not only stronger, but also more righteous than other gods. The wars against the Canaanites, and even more clearly the struggle between Jahveh and Baal in the ninth century B.C., were certainly, in part, over a moral issue, between a God of righteousness and truth on the one hand, and on the other hand deities devoid of any ethical qualities.<sup>1</sup> Later on, in the Hebrew prophets, the moral note becomes central and dominant; and even in the Priestly and Apocalyptic writings, it is never entirely lost sight of. It is well, therefore, that we should recognize that the intolerance of the Hebrews towards other religions was, at least to some extent, intolerance towards things which most of us today would regard as wrong, or at any rate as morally inferior to contemporary Hebrew standards.

It seems clear that at first the Hebrews believed that other gods besides Jahveh did really exist, and had to be reckoned with as formidable hostile powers. But they were confident that Jahveh was the greatest of them all: 'There is none like unto thee among the gods, O Lord!'<sup>2</sup> The prophet Micah (eighth century B.C.) even suggests that these other gods had a legitimate claim on the loyalty of their own peoples: 'All nations may live loyal each to its own god; but we will live ever loyal to our god Jahveh.'<sup>3</sup> This attitude, sometimes entitled 'henotheism' or 'monolatry', is distinct from 'monotheism', which maintains that only one God really exists.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*, pp. 186 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxxvi. 8; cf. Ps. lxxxix, 6, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Micah iv. 5 (Moffatt).

<sup>4</sup> W. S. Albright (of Johns Hopkins University, U.S.A.) has questioned whether the Hebrews ever did pass through the stage of 'henotheism' (*From the Stone Age to Christianity* [Baltimore, 1946], p. 219). In any case, Hebrew monotheism was not an entirely novel

But from the eighth century onwards, some of the Hebrew prophets were undoubtedly true monotheists. To them, Jahveh was the one and only God, Creator of Heaven and earth, of a majesty beyond all human imagining. This was the view of Amos, probably the earliest of these whose writings have come down to us;<sup>1</sup> and it was set forth even more explicitly by the great Prophet of the Exile, 'Second Isaiah':

Whom can you compare with God? What can you put beside him?  
I am Jahveh, the Maker of all things; I alone stretched out the  
heavens; I spread out the earth; who aided me?  
I am Jahveh; there is no God besides me!<sup>2</sup>

What then of the other gods? They must be either non-existent, or at most 'shams and lies', pretending to be what they are not. As for heathen idols, the prophet can hardly find words to express his biting scorn for them and for their human devotees:

Makers of idols are all inane, and their adored images are futile!  
... None of them has sense enough to say to himself: 'Half of it I  
burnt in the fire, baking bread and roasting meat on it; and am I to make  
the other half a horrid idol? Am I to bow down to a wooden image?<sup>3</sup>

This monotheistic faith in Jahveh as the one and only God, when once grasped by the Hebrews, remained their central conviction for ever after, and eventually destroyed their belief in the real existence of other gods. But this did not in any way abate their hostility towards them and their worshippers; nor did it lead them to think that perhaps the One God might have revealed himself to other branches of his human family. All schools of Hebrew thought remained convinced that Israel was the only people that had received a true revelation from God.

(ii) *The note of justice and kindness to all men.* The note of hostility towards other religions, though undoubtedly predominant in the Old Testament, does not, however, exclude other notes. Among

phenomenon in the history of mankind; for it had been preceded by monotheism in other lands and cultures. The Egyptian monarch Amenhotep IV (Akhnaton or Ikhnaten) had tried to impose it upon his people in the fourteenth century B.C. (see, e.g., J. H. Breasted, *A History of the Ancient Egyptians* [London, 1908], ch. xviii). In Syria also, monotheism can probably be traced as early as the fifteenth century B.C. (see J. W. Jack, *The Ras Shamra Tablets* [London, 1935], pp. 5 f.

<sup>1</sup> Is. xl, 18; xliv. 24; xlv. 18 (Moffatt).

<sup>2</sup> Amos ix, 6 f.

<sup>3</sup> Is. xliv. 9, 16, 19 (Moffatt).

these we observe, first, the note of justice. This was specially characteristic of the prophets, who insisted that Jahveh, because he is so supremely great, must also be completely just and impartial towards all men. Amos, for example, begins his prophecy with a dramatic survey of Jahveh's absolute impartiality in meting out judgment to all peoples;—Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel. Exactly the same principles of justice are applied to each in turn.<sup>1</sup> Later on, he boldly affirms that the hereditary enemies of Israel—yes, and even the despised 'niggers' of Ethiopia—are as much the objects of Jahveh's care as the Chosen People: 'What are you more than Ethiopians, O Israelites? asks Jahveh: I brought up Israel from Egypt?—Yes: *and* Philistines from Crete, from Kir the Aramaeans!'<sup>2</sup>

From 'justice' it is but a short step to 'mercy and loving-kindness'; and in the Old Testament, there are some remarkable passages which go beyond justice, and breathe a spirit of genuine good-will towards the heathen, looking forward to their conversion and incorporation into the family of the People of God. This was the hope of the prophet who is sometimes known as 'the Third Isaiah':

Foreigners who join Jahveh, to worship him and love him, . . . them will I bring to my sacred hill, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar there; my temple shall be called a house of prayer for every nation.<sup>3</sup>

It may well be that these kindlier feelings towards the heathen also provided the motive of the Biblical stories of Ruth, the Moabite girl who became one of the ancestors of David, and of Jonah, the Jew who was rebuked by God for his unwillingness to give the heathen people of Nineveh an opportunity to repent and be saved. Certainly these stories seem to contain an implicit protest against the racial and religious exclusiveness of those Jews who could see no good in any Gentile. Here, the consciousness of the unity of mankind (implicit in the Hebrew tradition of the creation of Man by the One God) prevails over the consciousness of the unique status of Israel as God's Chosen People.

<sup>1</sup> Amos i. 3-ii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Amos ix. 7 (Moffatt). Cf. Is. xix. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Is. lvi. 6 f. (Moffatt). Cf. Is. xlix. 3-6.

Passages such as the above must be given due consideration in any attempt to form a fair estimate of the Hebrew attitude towards other religions. The spirit which they express has always persisted among the finer souls of Jewry, and may be found from time to time in the writings of the later Jewish Rabbis.<sup>1</sup>

These 'kindlier' passages are, however, relatively few and far between in the Old Testament, and are the exception, rather than the norm, in its teaching as a whole. Moreover, even where the heathen are spoken of with kindness, this is only when they are regarded as possible converts to Judaism. Nowhere is any approval given to their heathenism, or any suggestion made that in it there is any religious value. 'It was only in so far as the Gentile was a potential Jew, that he possessed any interest for a son of Israel.'<sup>2</sup> This was (the Jews believed) in accordance with the mind of God; for 'in so far as Jahveh was interested in other peoples, that was confined to their relations with His people, Israel'.<sup>3</sup> It is from this point of view that the so-called 'missionary texts' of the Old Testament are written.<sup>4</sup> These do indeed show that among the Jews there were some who desired that the heathen should be saved and brought into the kingdom of the Messiah, rather than be destroyed. But they never contemplate the possibility of salvation except through absorption into the community of the Chosen People.

There are many Old Testament passages which enjoin kindness to 'the stranger' or 'the foreigner'; but these too only contemplate the foreigner *after* he has become a worshipper of Jahveh.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism*, Series I (Cambridge, 1917), particularly chs. II, VII, XIV, XIX, XX.

<sup>2</sup> W. Fairweather, *The Background of the Gospels* (Edinburgh, 1911), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> H. F. Hamilton, *Discovery and Revelation* (London, 1918), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Is. ii. 2, 3; xl ix. 6; lvi. 6-8; lx; Mal. i. 11, etc. The 'missionary note' is not prominent in the Old Testament. H. H. Rowley, however, while agreeing that 'Judaism is not essentially a missionary religion', holds that 'the Old Testament is a missionary book' (*The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* [London, 1944], p. 76).

<sup>5</sup> Exod. xxii. 21; xxiii. 9; Deut. x. 19; Jer. xxii. 3; Mal. iii. 5, etc. In these passages, the Hebrew word most commonly used is *גַּזְעִיל*; and this denotes a person of foreign birth, but (according to the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*) one who has become a convert to Judaism (vol. x, p. 220); or 'one who has been received under the protection of Israel', on condition that he abstains from heathen worship (vol. v, pp. 615 f.). Where *heathen* foreigners are designated, other words are generally used (*גַּזְעִיל* or *גַּזְעִיל* or *גַּזְעִיל*); and in the majority of these cases, the policy enjoined towards these foreigners is one of stern repression and rigid exclusion from the community of God's people (Exod. xii. 43; Numb. xviii. 4; Joel iii. 17; Is. lxii. 8, etc.).

The humanitarian regulations are intended for Israel alone . . . the 'stranger within thy gates' does not mean any foreigner, but the client who has come into definite relations of dependence to some [Hebrew] citizen. Other foreigners are still 'enemies'.<sup>1</sup>

So too, in the passages which enjoin kindness to 'enemies',<sup>2</sup> the reference is never to foreign enemies of Israel, but always to personal enemies, who would themselves be members of the Chosen People.

It is clear, then, that for the Jews the term 'neighbour'<sup>3</sup> could be applied only to fellow-Israelites, and not to the heathen.<sup>4</sup> A genuine 'concern' for the welfare of non-Jews, and a desire to impart to them the blessings of the True Religion, is rare in the Old Testament;<sup>5</sup> and a readiness to *appreciate* their religions is entirely absent. Dr James Parkes—a learned and friendly student of Judaism—says: 'It is true that there is ethnic intolerance all through Israel's history'.<sup>6</sup> One may add, moreover, that without this note of intolerance, Israel would soon have ceased to have any history, for it would have been absorbed into its larger neighbours.

(iii) *God's 'use' of the heathen for the fulfilment of his purposes.* Although the Old Testament refuses to regard the heathen as of any intrinsic value in the sight of God, it frequently affirms that they are 'used' by Jahveh as his instruments. Indeed, viewed in that capacity, individual heathens are occasionally referred to in terms of respect.<sup>7</sup> But once they have served God's purpose, they may be cast aside as relentlessly as a worn-out tool. Thus Isaiah, after affirming that Assyria is 'the rod of Jahveh's anger' against apostate Israel, adds: 'When Jahveh hath performed his work upon Jerusalem, he will punish the King of Assyria. . . . Shall a rod shake him that lifts it up?'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. P. Smith, *The Religion of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1914), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Exod. xxiii. 4; Prov. xxv, 21 f.

<sup>3</sup> In Hebrew, generally עַד or נָמָת. In Lev. xix. 16-18 (Moffatt), 'neighbour' is used interchangeably with 'fellow-countryman' and 'fellow-citizen'.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Gentile is not a neighbour' (*Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. v, p. 620, art. 'Gentile').

<sup>5</sup> 'The idea that it is a duty to diffuse what you believe to be true was not sympathetic to Jewish minds' (C. G. Montefiore, *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism* [London, 1918], p. 246).

<sup>6</sup> J. Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity* (London, 1948), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Cyrus is styled 'God's Anointed One' (נָשָׁר) in Is. xlvi. 1; and Nebuchadnezzar, 'God's servant' (בָּשָׂר), in Jer. xlvi. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Is. x. 5, 12 (Moffat).

*The influence of other religions upon the Hebrew tradition*

(i) *Egypt, Babylon, Persia, etc.* The exclusiveness of Hebrew religion tended to prevent the Jews from borrowing, consciously or avowedly, from foreign sources. Even the impressive and highly-organized systems of religion which existed in Egypt, Assyria and Babylon seem to have evoked in Jewish minds nothing but feelings of revulsion and disgust;<sup>1</sup> and towards the indigenous cults of the Canaanites, Philistines, and other neighbouring peoples, the orthodox Hebrew attitude was one of unmitigated hostility.<sup>2</sup>

Yet even under such circumstances, it is always possible that some influence may have been exerted, though unacknowledged. This would seem undoubtedly to have been the case in the relations between Judaism and the Zoroastrian religion of Persia. For the close correspondence between some of the doctrines of later Judaism and those of Zoroastrianism certainly suggests that here there is something more than a series of mere coincidences; especially with regard to the doctrines of angels, demons, resurrection, and judgment.<sup>3</sup> But the exact extent of such borrowing by the Jews is hard to measure, and is never explicitly admitted by them. Moreover, in so far as non-Jewish ideas or practices were adopted into Judaism, they were moralized, spiritualized, and Judaized.<sup>4</sup>

(ii) *Greece: Hellenistic Judaism.* More far-reaching was the influence upon the Jews of Greek religion and culture. The mind of the Greek thinker differed profoundly from that of the Hebrew. In general, he tended to philosophic speculation, aesthetic charm, and (with a few notable exceptions) moral indecision. His outlook was tolerant and comprehensive. Most of the Greek philosophers were willing to regard the popular polytheistic cults (which they themselves despised) as useful concessions to simple minds. They were *interested* in religion, but as a rule not *committed* to any one form of it.

In the fourth century B.C., Alexander the Great combined in his

<sup>1</sup> Exod. viii. 26; Ezek. viii. 10; xxiii. 7-21. One might have expected that the lofty monotheism of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhnaton would have evoked some appreciation from the Hebrews, but of this there seems to be no evidence (see S. A. Cook, *The Old Testament*, pp. 85-93).

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xii. 30; I Kings xi. 1-8, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., J. H. Moulton in Hastings D.B., vol. iv, art. 'Zoroastrian Religion'; or W. O. E. Oesterley, *Judaism during the Greek Period* (London, 1941), ch. vi.

<sup>4</sup> D. C. Simpson, in *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London, 1929), p. 142.

outlook an ambitious Imperialism, which aimed at bringing the whole world under his sway, with an unusual capacity for appreciating other forms of religion and culture. He looked forward to 'the Marriage of East and West' in a World-Religion which should include within itself the best of all faiths.<sup>1</sup>

From time to time, indeed, the Greek became so conscious of his own cultural superiority, that he tried to impose his Hellenism<sup>2</sup> on 'backward peoples'. One instance of this was the effort of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) to force the Jews in the second century B.C. to adopt Greek culture and religion. That attempt was, however, repulsed by the Maccabees; and in the long run it only served to harden orthodox Jewish intolerance and exclusiveness.

But among the Jews of the Dispersion, outside Palestine, where the *lingua franca* was Greek,<sup>3</sup> the influence of Hellenism penetrated quietly but deeply, and produced a distinctive type of thought, known as 'Hellenistic Judaism'. This is reflected in many of the books of the Apocrypha, in some of the extra-canonical apocalypses, and in the writings of Philo, an Alexandrian Jew of the first century A.D.<sup>4</sup>

In many of these books, the language and thought are widely different from the main tradition of the Hebrews. For example, in the Book of Wisdom, God is described as the Immanent Spirit pervading the Universe;<sup>5</sup> the human soul is conceived of as a distinct entity, pre-existent before its birth in an earthly body, and surviving after bodily death;<sup>6</sup> and the body is regarded as 'the prison-house of the soul'.<sup>7</sup> Generally, the Hellenistic Jews firmly maintained their ancestral contempt for polytheism and idol-worship, and their loyalty to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but here and there are touches of a wider internationalism,

<sup>1</sup> See T. R. Glover, *The World of the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hellenism' was 'the conscious effort to be Greek' (W. Fairweather, *Jesus and the Greeks* [Edinburgh, 1924], p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> It has been estimated that in the time of Christ, the Greek-speaking Jews of the Dispersion numbered six, or perhaps seven, millions (Guignebert, *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus* [London, 1939], p. 215).

<sup>4</sup> For Philo, see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947) or C. G. Montefiore, *The O.T. and After* (London, 1923), pp. 485-538.

<sup>5</sup> *Wisd.* i. 7; xii. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Wisd.* viii. 20; ii. 23; iii. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Wisd.* ix. 15.

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and we even meet the suggestion that God might indifferently be called by Hebrew or Greek names—Jehovah, Zeus, or Dis.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, however, Judaism remained impervious to foreign ideas and practices. Neither the contention of Guignebert, that later Judaism, even in Palestine, was so completely 'Hellenized' that its doctrines in the time of Christ were simply 'the world's common property',<sup>2</sup> nor the attempts of some scholars to discover Indian or Buddhist ideas in the background of the New Testament,<sup>3</sup> seem to have met with general acceptance among scholars. On the contrary, 'foreign culture and habits scarcely touched the stricter Jews, at any rate in Judaea.'<sup>4</sup> There is therefore no need for us at this stage to pursue further study of the non-Jewish religions before Christ; for it seems fairly certain that the Palestinian Judaism in which Jesus was brought up had been but little influenced by any of these.

### *The Judaism in which Jesus Christ was brought up*

There is little doubt that the Judaism of Palestine in the time of Jesus Christ followed broadly the main tradition of the Old Testament in its attitude to all non-Jewish religions. The narrower and harsher elements in it are prominent in many of the Jewish writings which are more or less contemporary with the life of Christ. For example, the Assumption of Moses (probably early first century A.D.) exults at the prospect of the punishment of the heathen at the Last Judgment:

The Eternal God will appear to punish the Gentiles and destroy their idols. . . . Then thou [Israel] shalt look down from on high, and see thine enemies in Gehenna, and rejoice.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the *Letter to Aristeas* (c. 100 B.C.), §15; R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha of the O.T.*, vol. II, pp. 96 ff. Occasionally a Jew would send offerings to a heathen temple; as when Jason the renegade high priest sent gifts to the temple of Hercules at Tyre (II Macc. iv. 18-20). But in this there was no more strictly religious significance than in the contributions made by officials of the East India Company to Hindu temples in India. <sup>2</sup> Guignebert, *op. cit.* p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. P. C. Mozoomdar, *The Oriental Christ* (Boston, 1898), chs. I-XIII. Although there were Buddhist missions to Syria and Egypt in the third century B.C., there does not seem to be any clear evidence that they led to any tangible results (see Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* [Oxford, 1929], p. 43).

<sup>4</sup> T. H. Bindley, *Religious Thought in Palestine in the Time of Christ* (London, 1931), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ass. Moys. x. 10. For the date, see R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha of the O.T.* (Oxford, 1913), vol. II, p. 407.

The Apocalypse of Ezra (also probably first century A.D.) dismisses all non-Jews as worthless:

O Lord, thou hast said that for our [the Jews'] sakes thou madest the world. As for the other nations, thou hast said that they are nothing, and like unto spittle.<sup>1</sup>

Not all the Jews, however, adopted this scornful attitude. Some looked forward with joy to the in-gathering of the Gentiles into the Messianic Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> But this ingathering would of itself involve the abolition of all other religions except the one true religion of Jahveh the One True God.

There were various 'schools of thought' in the Judaism of Jesus Christ's day; but there is little evidence to show whether he was brought up definitely within any one of these. Very few scholars today seem prepared to accept the theories that Jesus was influenced either by the Sadducees,<sup>3</sup> or by Essenism, or Hellenism.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars have indeed questioned the originality of Christ's teaching, on the ground that parallels to almost every recorded saying of his may be found in the scriptures of other religions. But granting that this may be so, there remains an originality and uniqueness in Christ's message as a whole,<sup>5</sup>—in his attitude to the outcast, in his power of selection,<sup>6</sup> and, not least, in his silences<sup>7</sup>—the things that he did *not* say or do. In all these, there is (as Renan observed) 'un esprit nouveau et un cachet originale.'<sup>8</sup> It would be perhaps hard to improve on the balanced conclusion of a great Jewish scholar, Dr Israel Abrahams, that while there are in the message of Jesus elements both prophetic and apocalyptic, and much that is in harmony with the best type of Pharisaism,

<sup>1</sup> II Esdras vi. 55f. Also called '4 Ezra'. See Charles, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 542-624.

<sup>2</sup> As in parts of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (probably c. 100 B.C.; see Charles, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 282-367). See, e.g., Test. Naphtali viii. 3; Test. Levi xviii. 9; Test. Judah xxii. 6; but some of these may be later Christian interpolations.

<sup>3</sup> So R. Lesinsky, *Die Sadduzäer* (Berlin, 1912): 'Jesus von Sadduzäischen Lehren ausserordentlich stark beeinflusst war' (p. 281). Even if so, there is no evidence that the Sadducees were any less contemptuous of the heathen than their Pharisaic opponents.

<sup>4</sup> See Guignebert, *Jesus* (Eng. trans., London, 1935), pp. 139, 400.

<sup>5</sup> See C. G. Montefiore, *The Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1910), pp. 38-45, 85.

<sup>6</sup> See Estlin Carpenter, *Studies in Theology* (London, 1903), pp. 263 f.

<sup>7</sup> 'He that possesseth the word of Jesus is able also to hearken unto his silence' (Ignatius, *Ad Ephes.* § 15).

<sup>8</sup> *Etudes d'Histoire et de Religion* (Paris, 1862), p. 188.

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there is also a strong note of 'original eclecticism' in all his teaching.<sup>1</sup>

That his own family was broadly 'Pharisaic' in outlook would seem very probable; for the country folk of Galilee would naturally have more in common with the popular 'High Church' and nationalistic Pharisees, than with the aristocratic and worldly Sadducees.

Among the Pharisees were many of really deep religious feeling—men of silent lips. To this section belonged such devout souls as Joseph, Simeon, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Elizabeth, Mary and Anna; and it was into such devout circles that Jesus was born.<sup>2</sup>

But it is also likely that in Galilee, as an outlying district, Pharisaism was less rigidly orthodox than at Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The wording of the Song of Simeon (when the infant Jesus was presented in the Temple, and was hailed as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles', as well as 'the glory of God's People Israel'),<sup>4</sup> indicates that St Luke believed that Jesus was brought up in a type of Judaism that was relatively charitable towards the heathen. In any case, whatever may have been the precise ecclesiastical background of Jesus, there can be little doubt that the education which he received at home and in the synagogue-school at Nazareth was broadly based on the fundamental principles of the Old Testament and the Hebrew tradition, strongly tinged with the prevalent Jewish nationalism.

## THE MESSAGE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

We turn now to the New Testament, to ascertain what was the content of the message proclaimed by Jesus Christ during his life on earth.

### *The reliability of the Gospels*

It may be well at this point to indicate briefly the view here taken of the reliability of the Gospels as evidence for the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It would obviously be impossible in these lectures to attempt to study the intricacies of the Synoptic Problem or the Problem of the Fourth Gospel; nor is the present writer qualified

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1917), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> T. H. Bindley, *Religious Thought in Palestine*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the phrase 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (Matt. iv. 15); and cf. John vii. 41, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Luke ii. 32.

as a New Testament scholar to express an independent opinion upon these. But it may be well to make clear the point of view from which the Gospels will be approached in these lectures. It is as follows:

(a) The main outlines of the life and character of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels may be accepted as historically reliable. Three quotations from well-known scholars may be cited in support of this:

(i) The chief interest of the Gospels is historical. Whatever else they are, they are records of the acts and teachings of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) The sayings of Jesus in our Synoptists are what they are, because they actually *are* the sayings of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

(iii) Much that we should like to know remains uncertain. But the figure of the Saviour is not shadowy; His character lives; the Gospels give us a genuine portrait.<sup>3</sup>

There is an issue at stake here of fundamental importance, between those who hold views such as we have just quoted, and those who follow the radical critics of the nineteenth century, or the extreme 'Form-Critics' of the twentieth, to the conclusion of Bultmann, that 'we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus', and that what survives the critical process is 'neither inspired nor inspiring';<sup>4</sup> or to that of R. H. Lightfoot, that we can find in the Gospels 'only a whisper of his voice, and only the outskirts of his ways'.<sup>5</sup> In that case, 'Christianity' can no longer be regarded as 'the religion of Jesus Christ'. Its adherents may profess the Catholic Faith;<sup>6</sup> but that faith cannot then be regarded as founded upon the foundation of the historic person and message of Jesus; it is essentially a faith in the Church, rather than in its reputed Founder. We agree, on the contrary, 'with Dr Foakes-Jackson that 'a constant return to the Message and

<sup>1</sup> E. F. Scott, *The Validity of the Gospel Record* (London, 1938), p. 10; cf. pp. 13, 184.

<sup>2</sup> B. G. Easton, *The Gospel before the Gospels* (London, 1925), p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. Inge, *Christian Ethics* (London, 1930), p. 43. The substantial reliability of the Gospel-portrait of Jesus is maintained also by Maurice Jones, *The N.T. in the 20th Century* (London, 1934 ed.), pp. 189-219; and by C. J. Cadoux, *The Historic Mission of Jesus* (London, 1941), pp. 3-11.

<sup>4</sup> D. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London, 1935), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *Bampton Lectures*, 1934, p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> As with A. Loisy, G. Tyrrell, or D. R. Bultmann.

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Person of the historic Jesus is a vital necessity';<sup>1</sup> and that without this, we have no right to claim that our message really is 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ', or that this is relevant to the world's needs. For, as Prof. Burkitt has said:

The more we understand these things [the outward events of the Ministry of Jesus, and the position which Our Lord actually took up with regard to contemporary questions], and the more we individualise the Figure of our Lord as manifested in action in that long past scene, the better shall we be able to embody the spirit of His teaching in forms appropriate to our own surroundings.<sup>2</sup>

(b) While the standpoint of these lectures is thus more conservative than that of the extremer types of 'Form-Criticism', it does not assume that the Gospel narratives are accurate in every detail, nor ignore the influence of 'doctrinal motives' in their compositions. It is now generally recognized that the Gospels were written not simply as biographies, to record in chronological order the events of Christ's life and the words that he spoke, but as *interpretations* of these things, presented in such a way as to confirm Christian faith in him as Messiah and Son of God.<sup>3</sup> But it is one thing to recognize this as a real factor in the making of the Gospels: it is quite another to conclude, with some of the Form-Critics, that this has destroyed all the value of the Gospels as biographies.<sup>4</sup> Such a conclusion fails to explain the naturalness of the dramatic development in the life of Christ as it stands in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, if the *kerygma* (message) in the Gospels owes its present form to the needs of the early Christian

<sup>1</sup> In *Cambridge Theological Essays* (1905). Contrast Kierkegaard: 'History has nothing whatever to do with Christ.' (T. H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard Studies* [London, 1948], p. 130). or Emil Brunner: 'Christian faith is not interested in the Founder of Christianity' (*The Mediator*, Eng. trans., London, 1934, p. 81).

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel History and its Transmission* (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> This was recognized as long ago as 1917, by T. R. Glover, in his *Jesus of History*, p. 13. Cf. E. F. Scott, *op. cit.* pp. 23, 161; or C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (London, 1938), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> K.-L. Schmidt, for example, says: 'A tous les évangiles manque ce que nous réclamons de la plus modeste biographie' (*Le Problème du Christianisme primitif* [Paris, 1938], p. 17). R. H. Lightfoot finds in the Gospel narratives 'only a series of disconnected stories' (*op. cit.* p. 41).

<sup>5</sup> See the present writer's booklet, *The World's Greatest Drama* (Calcutta, 1941). Cf. B. J. Easton, *Life* (Edinburgh, 1920), p. 44.

community rather than to what Jesus himself taught<sup>1</sup>—if, in other words, the recorded sayings and deeds of Jesus were created, or at least modified, in order to support the beliefs and doctrines of the early Church—then one can only say that for this purpose they are curiously ineffective. For their endorsement of Church doctrine is incidental and indirect, rather than clear and explicit; and they contain a number of passages which have always been a source of perplexity, rather than of reassurance, to Christian faith, and would certainly not have been invented by orthodox Christian piety.<sup>2</sup>

(c) As regards the relative historical value of the several Gospels, two tendencies are apparent in recent writers. Some of these are inclined to question the general conclusion of earlier New Testament criticism<sup>3</sup> that St Mark is the most reliable as a record of actual events and maintain that the Marcan chronology and narrative is no more strictly historical (in some cases even less historical) than that of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

There are, however, many eminent scholars today who still hold that in St Mark, the 'doctrinal motive' is less apparent than in any other Gospel, and that consequently St Mark, together with the sayings of Jesus generally supposed to have been taken from the lost document 'Q', bring us nearest to the actual words and sayings of Jesus. This is the view adopted in these lectures. It is well summarized by Bishop A. C. Headlam:<sup>5</sup>

The position that I have assumed is . . . that in St Mark's Gospel we have a coherent and trustworthy narrative of the life of Jesus, and

<sup>1</sup> M. Dibelius, *Gospel Criticism and Christology* (London, 1935), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Mark x. 18; cf. vi. 5.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. F. C. Burkitt, *op. cit.* p. 75; or B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London, 1926), pp. 157 ff.

<sup>4</sup> For example, W. K. Lowther Clarke dismisses St Mark as 'historically worthless' (*N.T. Problems* [London, 1929], p. 19); and M. Dibelius says: 'No one will accept St Mark's order as chronological' (*Gospel Criticism and Christology* [Eng. trans. London, 1935], p. 68). C. H. Dodd considers that St Mark consists largely of 'detached episodes' (*The Apostolic Preachings* [London, 1936], p. 109). Hoskyns and Davey maintain that St Mark is no more 'historical' than St John (*The Riddle of the N.T.* [London, 1931], pp. 91, 185, 214).

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Theology* (London, 1934), p. 245. Cf. E. F. Scott: 'It cannot be questioned that St Mark has placed the events in a more natural and intelligible order than any other evangelist; and he cannot have done this by accident' (*op. cit.* p. 184). A similar estimate is adopted by Dr H. D. A. Major, in *The Message and Mission of Jesus* (London, 1937), p. xxi, and by Dr C. J. Cadoux, in *The Historic Mission of Jesus*, pp. 10-14.

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that the great bulk of the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels represents the words of our Lord as recorded by the first Christian generation, and is for the most part authentic. They have probably experienced some modification in transmission; but the amount of this is slight. So far as concerns the inward principles of His teaching we need not doubt that we have adequate means of knowing what was the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In St Matthew and St Luke, the 'doctrinal motives' are more evident than in St Mark. St Matthew's main concern seems to be to prove to Jewish Christians that Jesus was indeed the Messiah promised in the Old Testament;<sup>1</sup> while St Luke is anxious to show that Jesus is the Saviour of all mankind, irrespective of race or class.<sup>2</sup>

The Problem of the Fourth Gospel may best be deferred for later consideration;<sup>3</sup> and we will now turn to the evidence in the three Synoptic Gospels.

### *The attitude of Jesus Christ to Judaism*

There was, as we have seen,<sup>4</sup> only one religious system with which Jesus Christ was in intimate contact; and that was his own ancestral Hebrew religion. What was his attitude towards Judaism?

(i) *Substantially, he accepts it.* In his 'theology' he follows the Old Testament, taking for granted, without argument, that God exists, as a living personal being, with whom all men can have personal relations, and who has specially intimate relations with Jesus himself.

In picturing this relationship Jesus adopts mainly the simile of the human relationship between father and child. In agony at Gethsemane, he prays: 'Abba, Father!'<sup>5</sup> On the Cross, he cries: 'Father, forgive them! . . . Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'<sup>6</sup> To his disciples, he says: 'When ye pray, say "Our Father"'.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he never suggests that this God whom he knew as *his* father is any other than the God of the Old Testament, 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'.<sup>8</sup> There is nothing to indicate that he ever conceived of God in a philosophical way, as

<sup>1</sup> See G. D. Kilpatrick, *Origins of the Gospel according to St Matthew* (Oxford, 1946), ch. vi.

<sup>2</sup> See B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, pp. 219 f.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 84-6.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 71 f.

<sup>5</sup> Mark xiv. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Luke xxiii. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. vi. 9; cf. Luke xi. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Mark xii. 26, etc.

'the Absolute'; or that he ever contemplated the possibility that there might be other gods besides the One.<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of phraseology, he uses Jewish terms—'the Messiah', 'the Son of Man', 'the Kingdom of God', and also the imagery of Jewish apocalyptic—as the channels of his message.<sup>2</sup> In his relations with organized Judaism, he is careful (at any rate at first) not to violate Jewish ecclesiastical rules.<sup>3</sup> In his emotional sympathies, his lament over Jerusalem shows that he shared in the patriotic feelings of his Jewish fellow-countrymen.<sup>4</sup> In all these ways, he reaffirmed the main principles of the Hebrew tradition.

It does not, however, necessarily follow from this that every incidental reference of his to the details of that tradition,—such as the Mosaic authorship of the Law,<sup>5</sup> or the Davidic authorship of the Psalms,<sup>6</sup> or the story of Jonah<sup>7</sup>—implies that he expressly endorsed the traditional view of these. Such incidental references do, no doubt, imply that he did not question current opinions on these points; but they are not evidence that he deliberately pronounced these opinions to be true.

(ii) *He also claims the right to 'judge'.* Jesus did not simply accept the tradition of his forefathers as a whole, without questioning it, or discriminating between the different elements in it. From boyhood, he shows an independent, critical judgment;<sup>8</sup> and this is evident especially in his use of the Old Testament. For instance, from the mass of detail in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, he singles out the fundamental moral principles: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour.'<sup>9</sup> From the relatively obscure prophecy of Hosea, he selects the ethical challenge: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'<sup>10</sup> To the legal and ritual regulations of the Old

<sup>1</sup> Mark xii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> The extent to which he himself used apocalyptic imagery is disputed; but few would deny that he did use it to some extent. See the present writer's *Primitive Christian Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1912), chs. xv–xvii. In apocalyptic, there is much that is strange and bizarre to our minds; but at least the apocalypticists were the first to see the spiritual significance of history as a whole (see R. H. Charles, *Between the Old and New Testaments* [London, 1914], p. 24). <sup>3</sup> Mark i. 44; Matt. iii. 15; Luke v. 14. <sup>4</sup> Matt. xxiii. 37 = Luke xiii. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Mark x. 3: 'What did Moses command you?'

<sup>6</sup> Mark xii. 36: 'David himself said, . . .'

<sup>7</sup> Luke xi. 29 f: 'The sign of Jonah.'

<sup>8</sup> Luke ii. 49 (the boy Jesus in the Temple).

<sup>9</sup> Mark xii. 30; quoted from Deut. vi. 4 and Lev. xix. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. ix. 13, etc.; quoted from Hos. vi. 6.

Testament, he never appeals at all. 'The originality of Jesus', says Dr Major, 'is seen especially in his selection of Old Testament passages for quotation, and in the new meanings he gave to them.'<sup>1</sup>

There is an element of 'judgment' also in the claim of Jesus that the Old Testament was 'fulfilled' in himself;<sup>2</sup>—in other words, that the ideals seen dimly by the men of the Old Testament were set forth clearly in his own person and message. He believed and taught that God's eternal purpose to bring redemption to Israel by a Messiah was being actually carried out through his own life on earth,<sup>3</sup> and that the age-long hope of Israel for the coming of the Kingdom of God at the end of the Age would thereby be realized. But he 'fulfils' Jewish conceptions of the Messiah and the Kingdom by replacing them with higher and more spiritual ones. He is 'Messiah'; but not in the role of military victor,<sup>4</sup> nor in that of a purely supernatural 'Son of Man';<sup>5</sup> but rather after the manner of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, in Isaiah;—a figure which, though not in the past associated by the Jews with the Messiah,<sup>6</sup> seems to have made a profound impression upon his mind.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the terms in which he pictures the Kingdom of God are not such as to suggest either a political revolution, nor yet a purely miraculous 'irruption' of God, regardless of what man might do; but rather, as a 'mystery', the essence of which is now revealed to be the Rule (or Reign) of God in the hearts of men,

<sup>1</sup> *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (London, 1937), p. xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Mark i. 15; Matt. v. 17, 18; Luke xxi. 22; xxiv. 44.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of N.T. scholars are agreed that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah (see, e.g., the article 'Messiah' in Hastings' *D.B.*). Goguel thinks that the conviction that he was the Messiah 'grew upon him' gradually (*op. cit.* p. 319). Only a few are prepared to doubt whether he did really claim to be the Messiah. Strange to say, Karl Barth and Dean Inge, whose theologies rarely agree, are of one mind on this point. Barth says: 'Die Ansicht, als Hoheitsaussage, dass die in den Synoptikern so häufige Selbstbezeichnung Jesu als "Sohn des Menschen" . . . als von ihm dauernd ausgesprochenes Messiasbekenntnis zu verstehen sei, scheint mir sehr unbefriedigend' (*Kirchliche Dogmatik* [Zollikon, 1938], vol. I-II, p. 25). Cf. Dean Inge, in the *Modern Churchman* (Sept. 1948), p. 125: 'I cannot see why we should suppose that our Lord claimed to be the Messiah.' But in any case it is generally admitted that Jesus did, in some sense, proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup> As in the *Psalm of Solomon*, xvii (see Ryle and James's ed.).

<sup>5</sup> As in Enoch (Eth.) xlvi, xlviii (R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha of the O.T.*, vol. II, pp. 214, 216).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., K.-L. Schmidt, *Le Problème du Christianisme primitif* (Paris, 1938), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Mark x. 45; Luke ix. 56. Cf. John xii. 32; xiii. 15 and Acts viii. 32-5.

which can be realized only with their co-operation, by repentance and faith.<sup>1</sup>

So we see that this 'fulfilment' of the Old Testament involves not only a 'transcending' of the old, but also a definite condemnation of some elements in it, and a replacement of these by something better. According to the Gospels, this condemnation was directed especially against two features of Judaism as then practised—its exclusive nationalism, and its externalism.

The criticism of Jewish nationalist prejudices is especially prominent in St Luke's Gospel. According to St Luke, Jesus in his very first sermon at Nazareth used this as an opportunity for a direct attack upon anti-Gentile Jewish nationalist prejudices. He does this by appealing to the Old Testament itself, which records God's loving care for non-Jews: for the commander of the army of Syria—Israel's deadly enemy, and for a heathen woman of the notorious district of Tyre and Sidon. It is not surprising that his hearers were stung into a furious attempt to lynch him.

The same point of view finds expression in the Parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>2</sup> and in many of his later sayings and parables, in which he implies that many of the heathen will have precedence over the Jews in the plan of God. This note is prominent in all the Gospels, and not least in the most 'Jewish' of them, St Matthew. In that Gospel, Jesus is reported as saying of a non-commissioned officer in the Roman army:

I have never met faith like this, anywhere in Israel. Many, I tell you, will come from East and West, and take their places beside Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Realm of Heaven; while the sons of the Realm will pass outside, into the darkness.<sup>3</sup>

Another feature of contemporary Judaism which Jesus expressly

<sup>1</sup> This has been questioned; notably by A. Schweitzer, in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1910), pp. 237-40, 364. But in the Gospels as they stand, there are numerous sayings of Jesus in which the *moral* element in the Kingdom of God is emphasized; e.g. Mark iv. 11; x. 14, 23; Matt. vi. 33. Cf. I Cor. iv. 20; vi. 9 f; Eph. v. 5. In view of the eager 'eschatological' hopes of the early Christians, it is very unlikely that this non-eschatological element would have been introduced into the Gospel-records, unless it were genuinely historical. See the present writer's *Primitive Christian Eschatology*, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Luke. iv. 16-30. Some would associate this incident with Mark vi; in which case it falls somewhat later in the ministry (see, e.g., Peake's *Commentary, ad loc.*).

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 11 (Moffatt). Cf. Luke xiii. 29.

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condemned was its emphasis on the externals of religion. Again and again he insists that the inner spirit is more vital than legal accuracy; that justice matters more than ceremonial correctness; that the motive is more important than the external act.

Ye blind guides, which say: 'Whosoever shall swear by the temple—it is nothing! but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'—Ye fools and blind!<sup>1</sup>

Ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith.<sup>2</sup>

Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.<sup>3</sup>

Such sayings are in line with the great tradition of the Hebrew prophets; but they are supreme above them all, in insight and idealism.

It was, no doubt, mainly the *corruptions* of Judaism that Jesus thus denounced. But at times he does not hesitate to challenge even precepts ascribed to Moses himself:

Moses permitted you . . .; but it was not so from the beginning.<sup>4</sup>

Ye have heard that it was said . . .; but I say unto you . . .!<sup>5</sup>

A greater than Jonah, . . . a greater than Solomon is here.<sup>6</sup>

Here surely he is claiming the right to judge, and if need be to condemn, even the most sacred commandments of the old dispensation.<sup>7</sup>

(iii) *He foresees conflict between Judaism and his own message.* It seems that quite early in his ministry Jesus foresaw that an ultimate clash between his message and the leaders of Judaism was inevitable.<sup>8</sup> The 'new wine' of the Gospel was bound to burst the 'old wine-skins' of Jewish legalism. It is indeed probable that at first he hoped that the Jews as a whole would respond to his message by repentance, and that then the Kingdom of God would be

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 16 (R.V. marg.).

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xix. 8 (Moffatt). Cf. Mark x. 3 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. v. 21, 27, 33, 38, 43.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xii. 41, 42.

<sup>7</sup> It has indeed been maintained that Christ's saying 'Not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away' (Matt. v. 18; cf. Luke xvi. 17) implies that he taught that every detail of the law is binding for all time. See, e.g., J. Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity* (London, 1948), p. 58. But it is difficult to reconcile this with the general trend of Christ's teaching.

<sup>8</sup> Mark ii. 6, and frequently thereafter.

inaugurated without a struggle.<sup>1</sup> But as soon as it became clear to him that such a response was not forthcoming, the conviction grew upon him that only through his own death, as Messiah, followed by a supreme 'act of God', could the Kingdom be inaugurated.

Whether he himself expected or desired a definite breach between his own followers and the Jewish Church as a whole, is a disputed question.<sup>2</sup> The general trend of his teaching suggests that while he would not have desired separation, he would not have shrunk from it, if it seemed to him necessary in order to safeguard vital principles.

(iv) *The unique relation between 'the Gospel' and 'the Law'.* Yet, however sternly Jesus may have condemned the popular Judaism of his day, the fact remains that his message was related intimately and organically to the Hebrew religion, and that it was not so related to any other of the religions of the world. In order to demonstrate this, it is only necessary to set side by side (a) the Gospels, (b) the Old Testament, and (c) the teaching of any of the non-Jewish religions—say the philosophies of Greece, or the sacred scriptures of India, or the popular polytheisms of any race of mankind. It will then become clear beyond question that while there is a close and organic link between the thought and language of the Gospels and that of the Old Testament, there is no such link between the Gospels and any other religion or philosophy. They are built along other lines of thought; they are expressed in widely different terms; and they do not, in the same way, find their 'fulfilment' in the Gospel of Jesus. It was primarily 'the Law and the Prophets' that he came to fulfil.<sup>3</sup>

### *The attitude of Jesus Christ to non-Jewish religions*

(i) *To the religion of the Samaritans.* Strictly speaking, this was

<sup>1</sup> See C. J. Cadoux, *The Historic Mission of Jesus*, Pt. III, ch. 1: 'Jesus' initial expectations of success.'

<sup>2</sup> According to St Matthew, he referred on one occasion to 'my Church' (Matt. xvi. 18)—a term which would imply separation from the 'Church' of Judaism.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 17. Cf. S. A. Cook, *The Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1936), p. 224: 'The Bible is an indivisible whole; to rest content with the Old Testament alone, or the New Testament alone, is to lose the real inwardness of all that makes the Bible the most remarkable book in the world.'

hardly a 'non-Jewish' religion; but orthodox Judaism regarded it as a peculiarly pernicious heresy, no less detestable than heathenism itself.<sup>1</sup> According to St John, Jesus regarded the religion of the Samaritans as definitely inferior to orthodox Judaism.<sup>2</sup> This is probably correct; for those features of Judaism which he condemned were even more marked among the Samaritans than among the orthodox Jews.<sup>3</sup>

If this was so, then it is all the more striking that Jesus condemned so strongly the intolerance of the Jews towards the Samaritans. On several occasions, it is recorded that he singled out a Samaritan for special commendation.<sup>4</sup> In the Parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>5</sup> the main point is not (as is sometimes assumed) to inculcate the duty of human kindness in general, but to give an answer to the Jewish lawyer's question: 'Who *is* my neighbour?' The moral of the parable was inescapable, however unwelcome to an orthodox Jew. It was, that the duty of 'good neighbourliness' should govern the relations between even Jew and Samaritan—and if so, then, *a fortiori*, between *all* branches of the human race.

(ii) *To the religions of the pagan world.* Jesus, living as he did for the most part in Galilee, through which great caravan-routes passed, must have been to some extent aware of the great world which lay beyond the land of his own people, and familiar with popular talk about the political tension between Roman imperialism and Jewish nationalism. But in the former there was hardly any religious element. Imperial Rome was not concerned with abstract questions of religion. She rarely interfered with the religions of her subject-peoples, or tried to force her own religion upon them, so long as they remained politically loyal.<sup>6</sup> Hence it is

<sup>1</sup> In many matters of religion, 'the Samaritan was put on the same level as slaves and heathen' (W. M. Christie, in *Hastings Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. II, p. 558 *a*, art. 'Samaritans'). Cf. John viii. 48, iv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 22.

<sup>3</sup> The Samaritan religion has been described as an 'arrested development of Judaism', of which 'the dominant trait was a conservative and tenacious adherence to traditional belief' (W. J. Moulton in *Hastings E.R.E.*, vol. XI, p. 164, art. 'Samaritans'). Nor were the Samaritans innocent of offensive acts; for they were said to have polluted the Temple recently with dead men's bones (Josephus, *Antiq.* xviii. 2).

<sup>4</sup> Luke x. 37; xvii. 16. Cf. John iv. 39 *f.*

<sup>5</sup> Luke x. 25-37.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (London, 1911), pp. 370, 380.

unlikely that Jesus was ever conscious of any *religious* challenge to Judaism from the Roman State Religion.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to other religious systems of the world at that time, there is no clear evidence from the Synoptists that Jesus ever had any direct contacts, with either Greek philosophy or the mystery religions, or Oriental cults;<sup>2</sup> or that he ever expressed any judgment upon them.

*The evidence of the Fourth Gospel*

(i) *Contrasts and correspondences with the Synoptists.* There seems now to be widespread agreement among scholars that the Fourth Gospel cannot be regarded as a literal record of the words and deeds of Christ, but that it is a 'spiritual interpretation' of them, based upon a specific doctrine of Christ's person and work. At the same time, it accurately reflects the historical background of the period, and there are indications that the writer was familiar with the text of the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>3</sup> So 'the time is past when one could lightly dismiss this Gospel as one that has little or no concern with historical truth'.<sup>4</sup> But to separate out the history from the interpretation is almost impossible. We may recall the lines in which Wordsworth describes his afterthoughts of his own Cambridge days:

I cannot say what portion is in truth  
The naked recollection of that time;  
And what may rather have been called to life  
By after-meditation.<sup>5</sup>

Superficially viewed, the contrast between the Fourth Gospel and the other three is indeed startling. Its chronology, its literary style, and even its fundamental ideas, seem to belong to another world.<sup>6</sup> But on closer examination, many subtle and incidental points of contact emerge; and these are particularly notable in

<sup>1</sup> The controversy over Emperor-worship, which became so important in the early Church, does not appear in the Gospels.

<sup>2</sup> The possible influence of Oriental thought upon the early Church is discussed by A. Lillie, in *India in Primitive Christianity* (London, 1909); especially in ch. xi, 'The Essene Jesus'.

<sup>3</sup> See Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, ch. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> G. S. Duncan, *The Historical Value of the Gospels* (London, 1944), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *The Prelude*, III, 611.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., R. H. Strachan, *The Fourth Gospel* (London, 1933 ed.), ch. I.

relation to Christ's attitude to other religions.<sup>1</sup> Let us now consider this.

(ii) *Christ's attitude to Judaism.* In this matter, the emphasis in the Fourth Gospel does undoubtedly differ to some extent from that in the Synoptists. Throughout the Fourth Gospel, 'the Jews' as a whole (and not only 'the Scribes and Pharisees') are spoken of as the enemies of Jesus;<sup>2</sup> and he himself is represented as constantly referring to 'the Jews' and *their* law, as if he himself in no way belonged to them.<sup>3</sup> His disciples, too, are depicted as a group that is completely separated from 'the Jews', who have finally refused Jesus as their Messiah.<sup>4</sup> It may be that all this reflects the current ideas of the Christians at (or soon after) the end of the first century A.D., when the Fourth Gospel was probably written, and when 'Synagogue' and 'Church' had become two distinct and mutually hostile bodies.

On the other hand, the agreements between St John and the Synoptists on this point are no less striking. St John, as well as the other Gospels, records that Christ referred to the Old Testament as pointing to himself;<sup>5</sup> that he used its religious terms, but interpreted them in a spiritual way;<sup>6</sup> and that he challenged current Jewish orthodoxy in such matters as Sabbath observance,<sup>7</sup> social conventions,<sup>8</sup> and the inferiority of women.<sup>9</sup>

(iii) *Christ's attitude to the Samaritans and heathen.* With regard to the Samaritans, St John agrees with the Synoptists that Jesus, while viewing their religion as inferior to orthodox Judaism, strongly condemned the orthodox Jewish treatment of them as outcasts.<sup>10</sup>

With regard to the non-Jewish world, St John emphasizes, perhaps even more than the Synoptists, that Christ's message is to all mankind. *Whosoever* believes may have eternal life;<sup>11</sup> the Son of Man is 'to draw *all* men to himself';<sup>12</sup> and his flock is to

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., C. J. Wright, *The Meaning and Message of the Fourth Gospel* (London, 1933), pp. 31-65. <sup>2</sup> e.g. John v. 16: 'The Jews did persecute Jesus.' Cf. v. 18; xi. 8, etc.

<sup>3</sup> John vii. 19; x. 34; xv. 25.

<sup>4</sup> John i. 10, etc. Cf. xvii. 6-18.

<sup>5</sup> John v. 39 'The Scriptures . . . bear witness of me.'

<sup>6</sup> e.g. the Johannine conception of Judgment (iii. 19; ix. 39, etc.) and of Resurrection (xi. 25, etc.). <sup>7</sup> v. 10-18 (the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda).

<sup>8</sup> xiii. 4-8 (the feet-washing).

<sup>9</sup> iv. 27 (the woman of Samaria).

<sup>10</sup> iv. 39-42; cf. iv. 7, and viii. 48.

<sup>11</sup> iii. 15.

<sup>12</sup> xii. 32.

include 'other sheep', not belonging to the Jewish fold.<sup>1</sup> This world-wide vision of the scope of the Gospel contains an implicit condemnation of Jewish racial exclusiveness.<sup>2</sup> It does not, however, prove (any more than the Synoptic evidence does) that Christ ever directly affirmed (or denied) that there were elements of truth or value in any of the non-Jewish religions.

So, in spite of the very different method of presenting the message of Jesus, St John's Gospel largely confirms the picture given us by the Synoptists; and in the matter of Christ's attitude to other religions, it does not contradict it in any essential point.

#### INDIRECT INFERENCES FROM THE GOSPELS

We have seen that in none of the Gospels is there a direct statement by Jesus Christ upon the subject of any religion except that of the Jews and the Samaritans. Must we then conclude that we cannot claim the authority of Jesus Christ for *any* particular attitude to the non-Christian religions in our own day? This would (we think) be an unduly negative conclusion. For if the Gospels offer us a clear picture of his character and his general attitude to life and its problems, then it is justifiable to draw from them some conclusions as to the kind of attitude to other religions which is in harmony with his spirit, and which would (we may fairly believe) have his approval. Such conclusions may not be of the nature of direct proof; but they are not without weight. Let us then consider some of the outstanding features of the portrait of Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

#### *The note of authority*

On every subject, Jesus speaks and acts with decision, as one who believes himself to be directly commissioned by God. He never suggests that his judgments are subject to any human authority in Church or State.<sup>3</sup>

This note of authority is evident, as we have seen,<sup>4</sup> in his

<sup>1</sup> x. 16; cf. xi. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Streeter considers that 'Mark, Luke and John form a progressive series', illustrating 'a tendency to make more and more of the idea of Christianity as the universal religion, free from the limitations of its Jewish origin' (*The Four Gospels*, p. 425).

<sup>3</sup> Mark i. 22; vii. 1-22; xii. 13-34; xiii. 31, etc.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 79-81.

pronouncements upon the only religious systems with which he seems to have had direct contact, namely, Judaism, and the Samaritan heresy. It is therefore a reasonable inference that if other religions had come before his notice, he would have expressed his judgment on them no less decisively, and that he would certainly not have endorsed the superficial slogan, that 'all religions are equally good'.

*Independence, and freedom from conventionality*

The same consciousness of supreme authority which led Jesus to set aside some parts of the sacred scriptures of his forefathers led him also to ignore many conventional rules and customs that governed and restricted human intercourse and relationships in orthodox Jewish circles. He broke caste-rules by taking food with people of the lower classes: 'He eats and drinks with tax-gatherers and disreputable people!' (ἀμάρτωλοι)<sup>1</sup> He disregarded accepted rules of ceremonial cleanliness: 'Nothing outside a man can really defile him.'<sup>2</sup> Above all, he claimed the right to override the laws of the Jewish Church in the most sacred of all observances: 'The Son of Man is lord even over the Sabbath.'<sup>3</sup> It was the same in his dealings with individual men and women. He talked in public with people to whom no decent Jew would like to be seen speaking—with a Roman army captain of the hated 'army of occupation',<sup>4</sup>—with Zacchaeus, a 'Quisling' Jewish tax-gatherer in the pay of Imperial Rome,<sup>5</sup>—with Samaritans,<sup>6</sup>—with women,<sup>7</sup>—and even with women whom society regarded as moral outcasts.<sup>8</sup> No wonder he was spoken of with scorn as 'a friend of renegades and disreputable people'.<sup>9</sup> But in all this, he himself shows no sign of self-consciousness or self-righteousness; to him 'it came naturally', and he did it without hesitation and without fear. 'On every occasion', says Dr Fairweather, 'of a recorded meeting between our Lord and a Gentile, He proceeded, with absolute disregard of Jewish prejudices, on the broad basis of human brotherhood, to reveal spiritual capacity in the alien. Instead of

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 16; cf. Luke xix. 5 (Zacchaeus), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Mark vii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Mark ii. 28; cf. iii. 1-6.

<sup>4</sup> Luke vii. 2-9.

<sup>5</sup> Luke xix. 2-10.

<sup>6</sup> John iv. 39f.

<sup>7</sup> John. iv. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Luke vii. 37-50, cf. John viii. 3-11.

<sup>9</sup> Luke vii. 34, Matt. xi. 19, φίλος τελωνῶν καὶ ἀμάρτωλῶν.

conceiving the human race as composed of "Jew" and "Gentile", He viewed it as consisting of "the good" and "the evil".<sup>1</sup>

It does not, of course, follow that because Jesus dealt in this unconventional and impartial way with all kinds of individuals, he would therefore have viewed the religious systems to which they belonged with equal impartiality. But in view of his general attitude to life, it is surely legitimate to believe that, if he had been directly confronted with non-Jewish religious systems, he would have approached them with a similar freedom from prejudice, expressing his judgment on each of them on its own merits, and not assuming in advance that because their traditions were different from his own, they were unworthy of serious consideration.

### *The world-wide outlook*

In all the Gospels, there are passages which imply that while Jesus accepted the traditional claim of Israel to be God's Chosen People,<sup>2</sup> he also contemplated the extension of his Gospel to all mankind.<sup>3</sup>

Wheresover this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, . . .<sup>4</sup>

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world.<sup>5</sup>

They shall come from East, West, North, and South, and sit down in the Kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

He [Jesus] should die, not for the Nation [of the Jews] only, but that he should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad.<sup>7</sup>

It is not certain that in all these texts, we have *verbatim* reports of the words spoken by Jesus; but they certainly witness to the general impression left by his teaching.

There are, however, a few passages in St Mark and St Matthew which suggest that in the early days of his ministry, he did wish to limit the proclamation of his message to his own countrymen only. In particular, this seems to be implied in the story of the

<sup>1</sup> W. Fairweather, *Jesus and the Greeks* (Edinburgh, 1924), p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> To him the Jews are specially 'the Children of God' (Mark vii. 27; John i. 11).

<sup>3</sup> J. Klausner, however, maintains that 'Jesus never dreamed of being a prophet or Messiah to non-Jews'. (*Jesus of Nazareth* [London, 1929], p. 363).

<sup>4</sup> Mark xiv, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xxiv, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Luke xiii, 29.

<sup>7</sup> John xi, 52.

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heathen woman of Tyre and Sidon.<sup>1</sup> According to both evangelists, Jesus at first refuses her cry for help. In St Mark, he replies: 'Let the children first be filled, for it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' In St Matthew, his reply is even more decisive: 'I was not sent to any, except the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'<sup>2</sup> To suppose (as some commentators have done) that in these answers, Jesus did not really mean what he said, but was merely endeavouring to draw out the woman's faith, is surely an unconvincing explanation.<sup>3</sup> But what other interpretation is possible?

If we follow Streeter's view that St Matthew is here giving us 'a Judaistic modification of St Mark',<sup>4</sup> and that St Mark's report is substantially accurate, then the words 'Let the children *first* be filled' may be taken as implying that even while refusing the immediate request, Jesus had in mind the ultimate extension of his message to the heathen world. This policy would be in harmony with the view of some of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, that Israel was God's 'chosen channel' for the transmission of his message to the rest of mankind, and was therefore to be the first recipient of the message.<sup>5</sup> If this was the method that Jesus also had in mind, it will also explain the restriction (recorded only by St Matthew) in the instructions to the Twelve: 'Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town; rather make your way to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'<sup>6</sup>

On one point, all the Gospels are agreed;—that when it became clear that Israel as a whole was not prepared to receive the message—and still less, to pass it on—then Jesus unhesitatingly announced that God would choose other messengers. 'He will destroy those vine-dressers, and give the vineyard to others.'<sup>7</sup>

The world-wide outlook is also implied in the 'missionary

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 24-30; Matt. xv. 21-8. (It is not recorded in St Luke.)

<sup>2</sup> Mark vii. 27; Matt. xv. 24.

<sup>3</sup> 'It is much better explained as due to a genuine, if temporary, tension in his mind, than as a "pose", assumed in order to try the good woman's faith' (C. J. Cadoux, *The Historic Mission of Jesus*, p. 160).

<sup>4</sup> So B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 425. But A. J. Grieve, in Peake's *Commentary*, *ad. loc.*, considers that St Matthew is here 'more accurate' than St Mark (p. 714 a).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Is. xl ix. 6 etc.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. x. 5 f. (Moffatt).

<sup>7</sup> Mark. xii. 9; cf. Matt. viii. 11 f.; Luke xiii. 29.

commissions' which are recorded in the New Testament as delivered by Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection.

Go and make disciples of all nations.<sup>1</sup>

That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his [Jesus'] name to all nations.<sup>2</sup>

Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.<sup>3</sup>

Ye shall be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth.<sup>4</sup>

Many Christian scholars hesitate to accept these as *verbatim* reports of words spoken by Jesus.<sup>5</sup> But in any case, they witness to the belief of the primitive Church; and if we compare them with the Gospels as a whole, we shall have little doubt that they truly express the purpose of Christ, that his message should be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

*The emphasis on moral and spiritual values*

Nearly all of the most striking sayings and parables of Jesus lay stress, not upon temporary or local forms of religious organizations or rites, or even doctrine, but upon inner and spiritual truths, which are God's universal laws, applicable to all kinds of men and women. For example: 'Blessed are the meek, . . . the merciful, . . . the pure in heart, . . . the peacemakers.'<sup>6</sup> 'Forgive, that ye may be forgiven.'<sup>7</sup> There is nothing 'sectional' here; nor in the central messages of most of the great parables, such as the Prodigal Son, the Sower, the Unmerciful Servant. Doubtless they had a special reference to the immediate situation; but they are applicable to all men at all times.

We noticed that Jesus, in his judgments on contemporary Judaism, always sought to go behind the external act to the internal underlying motive;<sup>8</sup> and this is characteristic also of his attitude to human life as a whole.

Every one who is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.      <sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 47.      <sup>3</sup> Mark xvi. 15 (Appendix).      <sup>4</sup> Acts i. 8.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. with regard to Matt. xxviii. 19, see Bishop Chase (late of Ely) in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. vi, p. 499; or Dean Armitage Robinson (late of Westminster) in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. i, p. 474.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. v. 5-9.      <sup>7</sup> Luke vi. 37.      <sup>8</sup> See above, pp. 56 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. v. 22; cf. I John iii. 15: 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.'

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Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.<sup>1</sup>

This poor widow cast in [to the Treasury] more than all they [the rich men].<sup>2</sup>

Whatsoever from without goeth into the man cannot defile him; . . . but that which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man.<sup>3</sup>

We may perhaps add to this the famous saying of the judge in the drama of the sheep and the goats:

Inasmuch as ye did it [or did it not] to one of these my brethren, ye did it [or did it not] to me.<sup>4</sup>

This has generally been interpreted in the past as an assurance that all natural acts of human kindness, wherever and however done, are inspired—unconsciously, it may be—by the love of God, and are acceptable in his sight. This interpretation has indeed been challenged,<sup>5</sup> but it is in harmony with the general trend of Christ's teaching.

Above all, in the message of Jesus, the central place of importance is held by love (ἀγάπη). It may be that the great affirmation 'God is Love'<sup>6</sup> is in form apostolic rather than 'dominical', but it can hardly be doubted that in substance it comes from the Master himself. All the Synoptic Gospels record Christ's pronouncement that the two great commandments are: 'Love God' and 'Love your neighbour'.<sup>7</sup> This neighbourly love is to be extended to all men, even to foreigners<sup>8</sup>, and enemies.<sup>9</sup> Its character is illustrated by many of the parables. In the 'Prodigal Son', the love of God is pictured in a dramatic act of forgiveness;<sup>10</sup> and in 'the Unmerciful Servant',<sup>11</sup> men are warned that in this, they must follow the Divine example. Love, which has its roots in God, must have its fruits in man; and the supreme test which Jesus Christ would apply to every individual and every religious system is: Does it, or does it not, foster and help to create the spirit of love, and the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xii. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Mark vii. 18, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxv. 40, 45.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Dr T. W. Manson, in *The Teachings of Jesus* (Cambridge, 1935), maintains that 'my brethren' denotes only 'the members of the Kingdom of the Son of Man' (p. 265). But Dr Grieve's interpretation, in Peake's *Bible Commentary, ad. loc.* (London, 1919), is that this saying lays down 'the worth of every human being as a brother of Jesus, a child of God.'

<sup>6</sup> I John iv. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Mark xii. 30 f.; Matt. xxii. 37-9; Luke x. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Luke iv. 25-7.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. v. 44-6.

<sup>10</sup> Luke xv. 11-32.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. xviii. 23-35.

## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

readiness to forgive (even at great personal cost), which is of the very essence of God?

### *The exclusive note in Christ's message*

So far, our study of the character and message of Jesus has enabled us to infer with reasonable certainty what must be the main features of a truly 'Christian' attitude to other religions, which claims to express the spirit of Christ. It will be an attitude that is both charitable and courageous, impartial and decisive. It will not encourage a thoughtless, good-natured acceptance of new ideas, without considering whether or no they are true; nor yet a wholesale condemnation of everything that does not bear the name or label of 'Christian', or that is not within the fold of the Christian Church.

There are, however, some passages in the Gospels which suggest, at first sight, that the claims which Jesus made for himself and his message were more exclusive than those which we have thus far indicated; and that he did, in fact, deny that God has revealed himself to man in any other way. In St Mark, it would perhaps be difficult to point to any passage of this kind. But in St Matthew and St Luke, there is at least one such saying, probably taken from the 'Q' document, which is generally considered to be of early date and high reliability.<sup>1</sup> 'No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him.'<sup>2</sup> Again, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying: 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'<sup>3</sup> The same note is echoed in the apostolic preaching in the Acts of the Apostles: 'In none other name is there salvation, for neither is there any other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.'<sup>4</sup> Do these passages indicate that Jesus Christ taught that only those who openly profess their faith in his name can attain to a real and saving knowledge of God; so that all unconverted non-Christians, as well as the religious systems to which they belong, must be regarded as outside the Way of Salvation? To that question, which is of great importance, we shall return in a later lecture.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 27; cf. Luke x. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Acts iv. 12.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 188-91.

At this point, we would only submit two considerations:

(1) With regard to the report of St Peter's preaching, in Acts, it is evident that 'the name' of Jesus cannot mean merely the verbal form of the name. For this varies from one language to another: 'Joshua', 'Yisu', 'Jesus', and so forth. Robert Barclay the Quaker, when arguing, against the Calvinists, that 'all men, even the heathens, may be saved', was confronted with this text: 'There is none other name . . . whereby we must be saved.' To which he replied:

Though they knew it [the Name of Jesus] not outwardly, yet if they knew it inwardly, by feeling the virtues and the power of it, they are saved by it. . . . Salvation lieth not in the literal, but the experimental, knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, in the Bible, the 'name' is often a symbol of the person named.

In the New Testament, . . . the 'name of Jesus' is a parallel term to the word 'Jesus' itself, and . . . briefly sums up the personality of Jesus as made known.<sup>2</sup>

(2) Leaving aside, then, the verbal form of the name, the question still remains whether the New Testament affirms that a true, saving knowledge of God is possible only where there is knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ, as a historic person, portrayed in the Gospels.

The New Testament passages quoted above might, by themselves, be taken as giving an affirmative answer to that question. But there are other passages which indicate that 'Christ', the Eternal Word of God, is not simply to be *equated* with Jesus, the historic human person. The Fourth Gospel tells us that the Word of God, that 'tabernacled' among us in Jesus, had also been operative in all creation from the very beginning,<sup>3</sup> and is 'the Light that enlightens every man'.<sup>4</sup> St Paul affirms that a thousand years and more before the birth of Jesus, 'Christ' was with the Israelites during their wanderings in Sinai: 'They drank of a Spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was—Christ.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, *Apology* (A.D. 1657), §xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> G. B. Gray, in *Hastings D.B.*, vol. iii, p. 480 *a*, art. 'Name'.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> John i. 9.

<sup>5</sup> I Cor. x. 4.

These and other passages<sup>1</sup> remind us that the Christian faith in 'Jesus' as 'the Christ' does not mean that the two terms are exactly synonymous. This has generally been recognized by careful theologians. The late Canon Storr of Westminster wrote:

Christian theology does not mean by 'Jesus Christ' simply the historic Palestinian figure [of Jesus]. . . . It means one who now exercises His authority through the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine (1922) makes a similar distinction between the historic Jesus and God's Eternal Word:

The coming of Jesus Christ . . . is the manifestation in history of the Word who 'was in the beginning with God and was God.' . . . To assert the pre-existence of the human soul of Jesus, far from being required by orthodoxy, is inconsistent with it.<sup>3</sup>

If this view is accepted, then it is possible to hold that salvation, mediated through the Eternal Christ, the Word of God, may be bestowed upon those who have not known of the historic person and message of Jesus, and perhaps also upon some who though they have heard of this, have not accepted it in the form in which it has been presented to them, and yet have endeavoured to be loyal to the Spirit of God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ.

This conception of 'the Larger Christ' is not without its dangers; and if it is to retain its distinctive Christian quality, and not lapse into a vague sentimentality, it needs to be linked with an emphasis on the *centrality* and *supremacy* of the historic revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>4</sup> But it is none the less a conception of vital importance. It occurs frequently in the writings of Archbishop William Temple, from the early days of 1913, when he contributed to *Foundations*,<sup>5</sup> to his later years, when in 1939 he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> e.g. 'I have existed before Abraham was born' [John viii. 58 (Moffatt)]; 'The Logos of Life . . . existed with the Father, and was disclosed to us.' [I John i. 2 (Moffatt).] Cf. also Eph. iv. 21, which Moffatt renders: 'That is not how you understand Christ—the real Christ who is in Jesus'; and Dean Armitage Robinson would admit the rendering: 'As he [Christ] is in truth in Jesus' (*Commentary on Ephesians* [London, 1907], p. 190).

<sup>2</sup> V. F. Storr, *Spiritual Liberty* (London, 1934), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Doctrine in the Church of England* (London, 1938), p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp. 136-45.

<sup>5</sup> *Foundations*, p. 341 n.

By the word of God—that is to say by Jesus Christ—Isaiah and Plato, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Confucius uttered and wrote such truths as they declared. There is only one Divine Light, and every man in his own measure is enlightened by it.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, Plato, Zoroaster, Buddha and Confucius had no knowledge of the historic Jesus; but Archbishop Temple evidently would not deny the possibility of their salvation ‘through Jesus Christ’.

To admit this wider range of salvation is not to take refuge in the amiable platitudes which assure us that it does not matter what religion one belongs to, because all religions are essentially one. On the contrary, Christ’s message always brings a note of challenge, and always acts as a sharp sword, piercing to the dividing of good from evil, and truth from falsehood. If we take it seriously, we shall find it to be a revolutionary message. But we need not assume that its challenge will be directed only to those whom we reckon as ‘non-Christians’, or that its sword will cut exactly along the lines that divide ‘the Church’ (as we see it) from ‘the world’. As Benjamin Whichcote (one of the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century), put it: ‘Our Saviour Christ accepts no other separation of this Church from the world, than that which is made by truth, virtue, innocence, and holiness of life.’<sup>2</sup>

In this lecture, we have endeavoured to ascertain what evidence there is in the New Testament as to the attitude of Jesus Christ towards other religions. In the last two lectures of this series, we shall seek to apply the conclusions reached in this chapter to the policy of the Church in our own day, in matters both of principle and of practice.

But before attempting this, we shall in brief outline review the way in which Christ’s message has been interpreted by his followers in the Church, from the times of the New Testament down to our own day. This will form the subject of our next lecture.

<sup>1</sup> *Readings in St John’s Gospel*, vol. I, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Dean Inge, in his Hulsean Lectures, 1925-6, p. 52.



LECTURE IV

THE TRADITION OF THE CHURCH



## LECTURE IV

### THE TRADITION OF THE CHURCH

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The history of the Christian Church may be regarded from one point of view, as 'Gesta Christi'—the story of the achievements of Christ himself, acting in the Church.<sup>1</sup> Few Christians would deny that the impress of Christ's personality and the influence of his Spirit have been reflected to some extent in the community that has borne his name through the centuries.

But there are differences of opinion, even among Christians, as to the extent to which the tradition of the Church reflects the true mind of Christ. Some are so convinced of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church that they accept the tradition as inspired, if not infallible, and would base their faith on this, rather than on the written records in the Gospels.<sup>2</sup> With St Augustine, they would say: 'For my part, I should not believe the Gospel, except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.'<sup>3</sup>

Others regard the tradition as (in the main) a corruption and perversion of the pure Gospel of Christ; useful perhaps as a salutary warning, but not a reliable guide.<sup>4</sup> Some would even agree with Bishop Barry of Southwell, that 'the one really for-

<sup>1</sup> This is the theme of E. B. Brace's *Gesta Christi* (London, 1882). Cf. Fr. H. H. Kelly, and Archdeacon (now Bishop) E. R. Morgan, in *Essays Catholic and Missionary* (London, 1928), pp. 110, 249.

<sup>2</sup> Dr N. P. Williams affirms his belief 'in the Holy Spirit guiding the process of dogmatic evolution (in the Church) "specifically and in detail; not vaguely and in a general sense"; but admits that this belief "rests upon an intuition" only (*Form and Content in the Christian Tradition* [London, 1916], p. 38). Fr. Loisy had a similar 'intuition', and deprecated as "futile" any attempt to go behind the Tradition of the Church to the original message of Jesus (*The Gospel and The Church* [London, 1908], p. 277).

<sup>3</sup> 'Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae commoveret auctoritas' (*Contra Epist. Manichaei*, I. vi; Paris Text, 1842, vol. xxviii, p. 185).

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Dean Inge: 'The record of Christian institutionalism is one of the darkest pages of history' (Hulsean Lectures, 1925, p. 111). Cf. his *Christian Ethics* (1930), pp. 13-17; also Harnack's *History of Dogma* (1894 ed.), vol. I, Prolegomena, pp. 1-13, and Presuppositions, pp. 41-128.

midable argument *against* the truth of the Christian religion is the record of the Christian Church'.<sup>1</sup>

A balanced judgment probably lies between the two extremes. It will recognize in the history of the Church many signs of divine guidance, but side by side with this, unmistakable evidence of the sin and perversity of man; so that 'the voice of the Church' needs to be continually checked by the test of the written records in the Gospels.

It is impossible in a single lecture to deal at all adequately with the traditional Christian attitude towards other religions. The mass of available detail is immense; and when any endeavour is made to analyse or classify attitudes and policies, the pattern of these is found to be very complex. All that we can attempt to do here is to illustrate, by a few examples, some of the main trends of Christian thought which can be traced through the centuries.

In order to understand these trends, it may be well first to trace briefly the development of the historical background; for this has been an important factor in determining the Christian attitude to other religions.

#### THE CHANGING HISTORICAL BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

A division of history into 'periods' is always somewhat arbitrary, but is often convenient. For our purpose, we may summarize the history of the Church under four main periods.

##### *First century to A.D. 313: The Church on the defensive against other religions*

As evidence for this period, we have the apostolic writings of the New Testament, and the Fathers of the first three centuries.

As soon as the Church began to spread outside Palestine, it was confronted by a challenge that hardly appears at all in the Gospels—

<sup>1</sup> *The Relevance of the Church* (London, 1935), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Probably the best available survey of the historical background of the Church from the earliest days to the present time, is Dr K. Latourette's *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 vols., London, 1938-45; new ed., 1947). It is carefully documented with references to original sources; and Dean W. R. Matthews of St Paul's, in his Preface to the 1938 edition, has said: 'I am not acquainted with any book which attempts to survey in so detailed a manner as this the whole of the Christian Era, and the whole world in so far as it has been touched by Christianity' (p. iii). Quoted hereinafter as 'H.E.C.'

namely, that of Greek thought, religion and philosophy, which was not prepared 'to take God for granted', as the Hebrews did, but was continually asking: *Why* are there so many forms of religion, and *Why* should any one of them claim to be final and universal truth?

During the first three centuries, the Christian Church was a small (albeit rapidly growing) body, subject on many sides to assaults from powers apparently much greater than itself. It was first attacked by the Jews, as a heresy; then persecuted by Imperial Rome, as a seditious organization; it was suspected by the masses of the people, as a movement that threatened the popular cults and mystery religions; and it had to meet the challenge and contempt of the philosophers.

All these were formidable dangers; and indeed, from a worldly point of view, it must have seemed almost certain that the Church would not survive them. In fact, however, the Church not only survived, but at the end of three centuries it was so strong that it was quickly transformed by an imperial edict from the status of an illegal sect into the official religion of the Roman Empire. 'Never in the history of the race had so complete a religious evolution been wrought in so short a time among so large a proportion of civilized men'.<sup>1</sup>

For some three centuries, however, the Church remained a minority-community, defending itself against powerful hostile forces. Such a situation is not conducive to a conciliatory or co-operative spirit, nor yet to missionary zeal for the conversion of the Church's enemies. At that time there was no class of 'professional missionaries' within the Church; and its leaders, while deeply concerned to keep its members free from the corruptions of paganism, do not, for the most part, seem to have felt a call to attempt any large programmes of mass-conversion of pagans to the Faith. The rapid spread of the Church was due mainly to causes other than direct evangelistic efforts.<sup>2</sup> But while

<sup>1</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. I, p. 369. Harnack reckoned that by A.D. 250, there were some 30,000 Christians in Rome alone (*Mission and Expansion of Christianity* [London, 1908], vol. II, p. 248). Latourette estimates that by A.D. 300, it is probable that between 5% and 12% of the subjects of the Roman Empire had professed Christianity (vol. I, p. 108). The Christian Faith had also spread beyond the borders of the Empire, into Armenia, Mesopotamia and India.

<sup>2</sup> See Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. I, pp. 64, 117, 244.

the Church's attitude towards the other religions, which were threatening its very existence, was mainly one of defence rather than of attack, this was generally associated with an uncompromising hostility towards them. At the same time, it is in these early centuries that we find, here and there, some of the most generous recognitions of the work of God outside the Church that are to be met with in the whole history of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

During these centuries, too, we find the Christians using an argument which they rarely ventured to use later on;—the appeal to unquestionable *facts* of religious experience. In the first great problem which confronted the Church, it was this appeal to experience which was decisive: 'Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have [obviously] received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we ourselves have?'<sup>2</sup>

So too, in I Cor. xv. 17, the argument: 'If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins' is used by St Paul as a *reductio ad absurdum*, based on an appeal to experience. For he realized that his readers *knew*, from their own experience, that they were *not* 'yet in their sins': and therefore the premiss: 'Christ is not raised' would also not hold good.

In later ages, when professing Christians were all too often patently failing to manifest 'the fruits of the Spirit', this argument was no longer effective; and so the appeal had to be made to authority, rather than to experience.

#### A.D. 313-1550: *The Church in power over other religions*

From the day when the Emperor Constantine granted freedom of worship to the Christian Church, its right to exist was only once seriously challenged in Europe. In the 'near East'—for example, in Persia—some persecution of Christians continued, spasmodically, till the middle of the fifth century;<sup>3</sup> and in Europe, there was a period in the seventh and eighth centuries when it seemed as if the victorious advance of Islam was going to sweep the Church

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 120 f.

<sup>2</sup> Acts x. 47; cf. xi. 17

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., B. J. Kidd, *Documents illustrative of Church History* (London 1920), vol. II, p. 295.

out of existence.<sup>1</sup> But that menace was at length repulsed; and with this exception, it may be said that for sixteen centuries, from Constantine till the twentieth century, the Church in Europe was not only secure, but was one of the chief powers in European history, political as well as religious. Towards paganism, its policy had changed from defence to attack; and Christian intolerance became 'much more unyielding than had been that of the Empire at its height'.<sup>2</sup> One by one the strongholds of paganism yielded to the Church's advance; till finally, Europe became 'Christendom'.

One notable feature of the period from the fourth to the twelfth centuries was the missionary activity of those types of Christianity which came to be reckoned as 'heretical'. The record of Arian Missions among the Goths in the fourth century, and of Nestorian Missions in Syria and the Far East in the fifth and sixth centuries, is one of magnificent heroism and self-sacrifice, in the true spirit of Christ.<sup>3</sup> No less heroic were the missionaries of the Catholic Church, such as St Boniface in the eighth century, or Raymond Lull and St Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth.

For many centuries after the overthrow of paganism, the Church in Europe had but few intellectual contacts with non-Christian religions. Its conflicts with Islam and with heathendom in the Middle Ages were mainly on the field of battle; and its theological arguments were directed more against schismatics and heretics within than against the heathen world without.

There were, however, in this period, a few Christian thinkers who endeavoured to set forth the fundamental principles that should govern the Christian attitude to other religions. Pre-eminent among these were St Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century—the last of the great apologists for the Faith against the old paganism of Greece and Rome—and St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century,<sup>4</sup> whose *Summa contra Gentiles* 'was written as a help for missionaries, and to assist in the conversion of the

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, 1926, vol. v, chs. vii-ix.

<sup>2</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. i, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> For Arian Missions, see G. F. Maclear, *A History of Christian Missions in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1863), pp. 37-43; or C. Anderson Scott, *Ulfilas* (Cambridge, 1885). For Nestorian Missions, see W. A. Wigram, *History of the Assyrian Church* (London, 1910); and J. Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (London, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp. 122 f.

Moslems.' St Thomas, and the Schoolmen who followed him, were true philosophers, and had a strong faith in the power of human reason.<sup>1</sup> But in the Middle Ages, the limits within which reason was permitted free play became continually more closely defined by Catholic dogma; and any attempt to transgress these was sternly repressed. One result of this was that the dividing line between 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' came to be less significant than the dividing-line between 'Catholic' and 'heretic'. Indeed St Thomas Aquinas regarded heretics as *more* guilty than the heathen, and as no less decisively outside the pale of salvation.<sup>2</sup> The slogan 'Extra ecclesiam, nulla salus' came to be more and more rigidly interpreted, as 'the Church' was more and more sharply defined; till finally it was laid down that the Church comprises only those who accept the supreme authority of the Pope.<sup>3</sup>

A.D. 1550-1800: *Catholic, Protestant and Heathen  
after the Reformation*

The Reformation broke the external unity of the Western Church; and thereafter Catholics and Protestants seemed generally more anxious to magnify their differences than to reconcile them. In many lands, national Churches were now openly challenging the claim of the Pope to be the spokesman of all Christendom; and in place of *one* recognized 'Christian attitude' towards the major problems of life, we generally find *two* attitudes, each claiming to be Christian, but each denouncing the other. Meanwhile, individuals whose opinions were in conflict with the main tradition of Christendom became bolder in openly avowing their views. All this led to a broader and more varied outlook, both within and without the Church. Moreover, those who were influenced by the 'scientific spirit' began to question the right of the Church to control men's thoughts and beliefs; and new theories of philosophy and history were put forward, often largely

<sup>1</sup> Fr. M. C. D'Arcy in his *St Thomas Aquinas* (London, 1930), p. 60, maintains that St Thomas was a 'rationalist', but not so extreme as Abelard, who maintained that even the Doctrine of the Trinity could be proved by Reason.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1907), vol. viii, p. 35 b.

<sup>3</sup> The Bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1293, declared: 'For salvation, it is necessary for every human creature to be subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff' (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. xv, p. 126 b.).

independent of (and sometimes openly contrary to) the doctrines of the Church. In England, Deism and Rationalism became widely prevalent; and on the Continent, in the later eighteenth century, Lessing and Herder were maintaining that all human history (including the history of all religions), is a single process, through which God is working, and within which all religions are partially (but none perfectly) true.<sup>1</sup>

All this was tending to undermine the old unquestioning assumption that Christianity is the one and only true religion. But on the positive side, there was little disposition to recognize that the Divine Spirit was operating as a living power outside the Church. Indeed, where Rationalism prevailed, any such idea would certainly have been frowned upon as 'dangerous enthusiasm'.

Another development with far-reaching effects during this period was the tardy (but eventually tremendous) awakening of missionary enthusiasm among the Protestant Churches. It was not till the seventeenth century that 'the missionary spirit' began to stir in Protestant Christendom.<sup>2</sup> First, the Puritan (and especially the Quaker) emigrants to North America, and then the 'Pietists' on the Continent, felt the call to evangelize the heathen; and this led on, in the eighteenth century, to the founding of missionary societies in many branches of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

*The nineteenth century: The Church's attitude to other religions in the light of modern knowledge*

During the nineteenth century, new knowledge, scientific and historical, spread rapidly throughout the Western world; and though generally resisted at first by the official leaders of the Church, it gradually penetrated even into Church circles, and produced far-reaching changes in Christian public opinion, particularly with regard to the belief in the infallibility of the Bible and of the Church. It was during this period, too that the comparative study of religions began to disclose many apparently admirable features in the non-Christian religions, and many

<sup>1</sup> See the articles on Lessing and Herder, in *Hastings E.R.E.*, vols. vi, and vii.

<sup>2</sup> For the attitude of the Reformation towards Foreign Missions, see below, pp 109 f.

<sup>3</sup> For a useful survey of this, see G. Warneck's *History of Protestant Missions* (Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1901 and 1906).

unquestionable resemblances, hitherto unnoticed, between them and Christianity. So a tendency arose in 'liberal' circles, both within and without the Church, to advocate a more sympathetic attitude towards them.<sup>1</sup>

But side by side with the general growth of liberal and scientific ideas, we must set the great missionary movement of the same age. Its beginnings go back, as we have noted, into the preceding century; but it was in the nineteenth that it became a factor of real importance in the history of mankind. It paid but little attention to the new knowledge in the realms of science or theology, and made its appeal to the elemental emotions of human nature—sympathy for the oppressed, indignation with wrong, the love of high and heroic enterprise, and the sense of obligation to a God who had redeemed mankind by his love.

With these as its weapons, it achieved truly marvellous successes. In face of the mockery of the men of culture,<sup>2</sup> and the frigid disapproval of the official leaders of the Church,<sup>3</sup> it built up within the Church a 'missionary hierarchy' of its own, and gained for itself a position of influence in Christendom as a whole. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had an army of some 50,000 missionaries in all parts of the world, and had won some ten million converts to the Christian Faith; so that approximately one-third of the human race were now professing Christians.<sup>4</sup> 'Nothing to equal this had previously been seen in the history of the Faith. Nothing remotely approaching it could be recorded of any other religion at any time in the human scene.'<sup>5</sup>

Of further developments in the twentieth century, little need be said here; for these have been indicated in our survey of the

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Estlin Carpenter, *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (London, 1904), pp. 14-25.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Sydney Smith and Charles Dickens. See below, pp. 170, 173.

<sup>3</sup> In 1797, Archbishop Moore of Canterbury, when asked by Wilberforce to give his support to the Church Missionary Society, replied that His Grace regretted that he could not with propriety express his full concurrence and approbation. He would, however, view the Society's proceedings with candour; and it would give him pleasure to find them such as he could approve (E. Stock, *History of the C.M.S.* [London, 1899], vol. I, p. 72).

<sup>4</sup> For statistics of nineteenth century Missions, see, for Protestant Missions, J. I. Parker's *Statistical Survey* (New York, 1938); and for Roman Catholic Missions, the article 'Missions' in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. viii. Also the summary in Dr A. C. Bouquet's *Comparative Religion* (Pelican Books), p. 200. <sup>5</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. vi, p. 448.

present situation in Lecture I. Until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the general trends of the nineteenth century continued, with no great change. Scientific thought and missionary enthusiasm pursued their ways without much mutual contact or influence. On the side of Missions, there was a disposition for a time to make some concessions to the more 'liberal' outlook, and to approach the other religions with greater courtesy, if not in a spirit of actual co-operation.<sup>1</sup> But the notes of 'urgency' and 'crisis' were constantly sounded, and missionary leaders were confident that they were leading a victorious army to conquest. In 1910 came the publication of John R. Mott's *Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*, which immediately followed the great Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, with its slogan 'The Immediate Conquest of the World!'<sup>2</sup> The delegates at Edinburgh heard the prophetic forecast by that cautious statesman, Archbishop Randall Davidson: 'It may well be, that there be *some standing here tonight*, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power!'<sup>3</sup>

Since then, two world wars have had a chastening effect on the optimism of the previous generation; and the reaction against Liberalism, in both politics and religion, has produced a more uncompromising insistence on the uniqueness of the Christian Revelation and the contrast between it and all other religions. Also the increasing hostility of 'the world at large' towards the Christian Church has tended to create in the Church an attitude more militant than eirenic.<sup>4</sup>

#### SOME PERMANENT TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Against this changing historical background, it is possible to trace certain trends in the Christian attitude towards other religions.

##### *The supremacy of Jesus Christ*

This has always been at the heart of the Christian Gospel. We have seen that in Christ's own recorded teaching, the note of supreme authority is one of the fundamentals;<sup>5</sup> and it recurs

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 47-55.

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh*, 1910 (ed. W. H. T. Gairdner), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 86 f.

again and again in the apostolic writings. 'Christ is far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.'<sup>1</sup>

How much is involved in this confession of faith, is a matter on which Christian judgments differ. A Roman Catholic and a member of the Salvation Army would doubtless both accept it, but would deduce from it different conclusions. The former would find inherent in it the acceptance of the supremacy of the Pope, while the latter would repudiate this. But with a very few exceptions,<sup>2</sup> the acceptance of the supremacy of Christ has been the common faith, in every age, of all who profess and call themselves Christians; and all suggestions that he should only be accorded a place as one among the many gods or the many 'revealers of God',<sup>3</sup> has always been decisively rejected.

*The universality of the Gospel and the salvation of all mankind*  
 Closely associated with the recognition of Christ's supremacy is the conviction that his message is intended for all mankind; and that the salvation of all human souls, irrespective of race, class, or sex, is a primary concern of every Christian. This too is based upon the historic Christ as portrayed in the Gospels, showing forth his loving solicitude for the welfare of all with whom he came into contact.

It does indeed appear from the Acts of the Apostles that, for a short time, the first disciples conceived it to be their duty to proclaim the Gospel to the Jews only.<sup>4</sup> But very soon they had glimpses of a call to wider fields;<sup>5</sup> and when the rejection of the

<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 21. Cf. Phil. ii. 10; Col. i. 15-20; I Pet. iv. 11; Heb. i. 1-13; Rev. i. 5, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Some philosophers who would probably have claimed to be 'Christian' have ascribed final supremacy to 'the Christ-Idea', rather than to the historic person of Jesus; among them Hegel and D. F. Strauss (see H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* [London, 1937], pp. 108, 118; also A. S. Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God* [Oxford, 1917], pp. 409-13). And some Unitarians, who would also wish to be reckoned as 'Christians', would agree with Estlin Carpenter in anticipating that the day will come when 'men will cease to describe Jesus as the perfect revelation of the Father' (*Studies in Theology* [London, 1903], p. 266; cf. p. 236).

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, the 'friendly gesture' of the Emperor Alexander Severus in the third century (see below, p. 113, note 7); or the invitation of Theosophy today that we should agree to accord to Jesus a position of honour (but not of supremacy) among the 'revealers of God'. (See above, p. 21.)

<sup>4</sup> Acts i. 6; xi. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Acts ii. 39.

Gospel by the Jewish people as a whole drove the apostles to 'turn to the Gentiles',<sup>1</sup> the whole Church accepted the faith that the Gospel-message was human-wide in its application.

In the case of St Paul, this was evidently his conviction from the time that he first became a Christian. Side by side with his passionate longing for the salvation of his Jewish fellow-countrymen, he sets forth with uncompromising clearness a human-wide Gospel, in which

there is no room for Jew or Greek; there is no room for slave or freeman; there is no room for male and female; you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

By one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body,—Jews or Greeks, slaves or freemen; we have all been imbued with one Spirit.<sup>3</sup> In every human being St Paul saw 'the brother for whom Christ died'.<sup>4</sup>

In theory at least, this principle has always been maintained by the Church. In practice, undoubtedly there have been times when some branches of the Church have lost the sense of obligation to preach the Gospel to the whole world.<sup>5</sup> At other times the social or racial barriers prevalent in contemporary society have been so far accepted by Christians, that they have restricted the membership of their Church to persons of a particular class or race, and refused it to all others.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally the whole policy and principle of Missions has been attacked by professing Christians; but generally in such cases their motives have been obviously political or social, rather than genuinely religious.<sup>7</sup>

A notable exception to the main tradition of Christendom is however, to be seen in the attitude of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century. That they were definitely opposed to missions to the heathen is admitted, sadly but frankly, by so doughty a

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiii. 46; xviii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 28 (Moffatt). It should be noted that what St Paul here affirms is not a 'natural' equality of all men; but only an 'equality in sin', and in dependence on God for salvation. Cf. Rom. xi. 32; Gal. iii. 22.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. xii. 13 (Moffatt). Cf. Rom. iii. 29 f.; Col. iii. 11.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. viii. 11.

<sup>5</sup> This was largely the case with the Church of England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; in many of the Orthodox Churches of the East for long periods; and even to some extent (as we have noted above, p. 101) in the early Church of the second and third centuries.

<sup>6</sup> See below, pp. 185 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See below, pp. 169-73.

champion of Protestantism as Dr Gustav Warneck. In his *History of Protestant Missions*, he says:

There was no missionary action by the Protestant Churches in the age of the Reformation; . . . not even the idea of Missions.<sup>1</sup>

Again:

To Luther, 'Missions' meant 'the Mission of the Reformation to the paganized Christian Church' [of Rome]; and he repudiated as 'devilish' the belief that the world as a whole will ever become Christian.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Warneck records that Melanchthon, too, insisted that the missionary commission of Matt. xxviii. 19 applied only to the Apostles, and agreed with Calvin that 'the Kingdom of Christ is not to be advanced by any industry of men, but by God alone'. This view was echoed by most of their successors, even till the seventeenth century, when it is found in the writings of the Pietist hymn-writer Paul Gerhardt, who died in A.D. 1637.<sup>3</sup>

Similar views occur occasionally among the smaller sects, even in our own day. For example, the 'Russellites' (*alias* 'The International Bible Students Union', or 'The Watch-Tower Movement', or 'Jehovah's Witnesses') are definitely opposed to the Missions of the Church—as indeed they are opposed to all activities of organized religion except their own.<sup>4</sup>

But such attempts to restrict or deprecate the spreading of the Gospel to all mankind are abnormal, rather than characteristic, in the tradition of the Christian Church. In the main stream of the Church's life, we find a true 'apostolic succession' of men and women who have gone forth in love and self-sacrifice, to proclaim the Gospel to their fellows. Often they have been persecuted by the authorities of the Church; sometimes they have opposed each other, because of their divergent theologies. Some of them were technically heretics;<sup>5</sup> some were devout Catholics;<sup>6</sup> some were staunch Protestants.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> pp. 8 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 10, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 17, 20, 29.

<sup>4</sup> See *I.R.M.* (April 1940), p. 217; or J. Black, *New Forms of the Old Faith* (London, 1948), ch. viii, 'Jehovah's Witnesses'.

<sup>5</sup> Arians, Monophysites, Nestorians, etc. See above, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. St Francis of Assisi, Raymond Lull, St Francis Xavier, Bartholémé de las Casas.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Martin Schwartz, William Carey, Adoniram Judson.

Their enterprise has not been marked by continuous advance. The 'tides of the Spirit' have risen and fallen, again and again; and even if at present we seem to be 'in the trough of a wave', it may be that Dr Latourette is right in thinking that the record of the past gives us assurance that we may look forward to the rising of another wave of missionary enthusiasm, higher than any that has gone before.<sup>1</sup>

*Hostility towards the non-Christian religions*

We saw in Lecture II that this attitude is widely prevalent in the Church today. It also has behind it a long tradition in the Church, continuously from New Testament times. It may even claim some support from the teaching of Christ himself; for his judgments were at times uncompromising and severe, upon individuals and classes who aroused his indignation. 'Senseless!' 'fools!'—even 'snakes!'—are among the epithets which he applies to them.<sup>2</sup>

Among his followers, hostility towards other religions has manifested itself in several directions.

(i) *Towards Judaism.* We learn from Acts that it soon became clear that the Jews as a whole were not responding to the Gospel message; and from that time onwards, Judaism came to be regarded by the Christians as a hostile religion, guilty, apostate, and opposed to the 'New Israel' which is the Christian Church.<sup>3</sup>

This is the position assumed by Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century, in his *Dialogue* with the Jew, Trypho.<sup>4</sup> Soon after this, Jewish hostility to the Church ceased to be a formidable danger; but Christian hostility to the Jews has continued all through the centuries, and has often assumed savage and horrible forms. In the ninth century, Archbishop Agobard of Lyons pronounced all Jews, and even their property, to be under the Curse

<sup>1</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. vii, pp. 418, 487.

<sup>2</sup> ἄφρονες (Luke xi. 40), ἀνοήτοι (Luke xxiv. 25), μωροί (Matt. xxiii. 17), and ὅφεις (Matt. xxiii. 33).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Acts ii. 14-23; iii. 12-26; Gal. vi. 16. This attitude is also very marked in the Johannine writings (see above). Dr. James Parkes, however, maintains that St Paul's attacks are directed not so much against the main tradition of Rabbinic Judaism, as against the Judaism of the Diaspora, which, he says, was 'drier, more formal, and timid' (*Jesus, Paul, and the Jews* [London, 1936], p. 124).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., *Trypho* xiv, xxvi, xlvi, cxxiii. The *Dialogue* ends, however, with mutual courtesies.

of God.<sup>1</sup> Some of the Popes tried to check the ferocity of anti-Semitic mob-violence; but most of the Reformers were fanatical anti-Semites.<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century, John Lightfoot of Cambridge, himself a learned Rabbinical scholar, pronounced the Jews to be 'a brood of Anti-Christ, whose end is perdition'.<sup>3</sup>

(ii) *Towards pagan idolatry and polytheism.* As the Church spread from Judaea into heathen lands, its members were confronted (as the earliest disciples had not been confronted) with paganism in all its forms. From the first, pagan idolatry and the cults of its many gods and goddesses was utterly condemned by even the most 'liberal' of Christian teachers, and every Christian convert was called upon to abandon all such practices, as degraded and superstitious. This policy rested upon apostolic authority; for with regard to the paganism of his day, St Paul reaffirms the stern exclusiveness of the Old Testament: 'What agreement hath a temple of God with idols? . . . Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord!'<sup>4</sup> And St John's parting injunction to his disciples is: 'Guard yourselves from idols!'<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament Apocalypse, idol-worshippers are classed with 'dogs, sorcerers, fornicators and murderers', and are excluded from the New Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Every early Christian writer—including the most liberal-minded<sup>7</sup>—echoes this uncompromising hostility to idolatry.

In this, they had the support, not only of the Old Testament, but also of some of the greatest thinkers of Greece; for philosophers such as Socrates and Plato, as well as dramatists such as Euripides, had nothing but contempt for popular idolatry, and for the gods and goddesses of paganism, whom they (like the Hebrew prophets) dismissed as 'shams' or 'lies', with no reality behind them.<sup>8</sup> Similarly St Paul roundly denies that the pagan gods have any

<sup>1</sup> J. Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity* (London, 1948), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Luther's *Schriften wider Juden und Turken* (ed. Munich, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> See Parkes, *op. cit.* p. 146. John Lightfoot was described by Gibbon as 'almost a Rabbi himself' (D.N.B. [1893 ed.], vol. xxxiii, p. 230).

<sup>4</sup> II Cor. vi. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> I John v. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. xxii. 15.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Justin, *1st Apol.* ix, xxiv, xxv, or Clement Alex., *Exhort. ad Gentes* i. For the attacks of the more uncompromising Apologists, see, e.g., Tertullian, *De Idol.*, and (in the fourth century) Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes*, books iii-vii.

<sup>8</sup> See T. R. Glover, *Progress in Religion* (London, 1922), pp. 150, 162, 183 f.; and cf. A. E. Taylor, *Socrates* (London, 1932), pp. 107-11.

real existence at all.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, both he, and the early Christians in general, evidently did believe that evil spirits really existed, and were operating in the heathen religions. These had to be reckoned with by Christians, and could be resisted and conquered only through the mightier power of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the mystery-religions of the second and third centuries, the Christian attitude was no less decisively hostile, and any friendly advances from that side were firmly repulsed.<sup>3</sup> Apparent resemblances between pagan rites and those of the Church only evoked the retort that the former were deliberate and diabolical imitations of the latter.<sup>4</sup> Even with regard to the customary public reverence to the statues of the Emperor, the Christians were obdurate and uncompromising in their refusal to conform. Easy-going government officers were perplexed and irritated by this; for in their eyes, Emperor-worship was simply a sign of loyalty, 'with no more religious significance than the singing of "God save the King" in India under British rule'.<sup>5</sup> (In fact, however, a renunciation of Christ *was* sometimes demanded, at the same time.<sup>6</sup>) But even under the stress of persecution, the Church never contemplated any surrender to paganism, or any compromise with it, such as would have been welcomed by the more tolerant adherents of the old cults.<sup>7</sup>

Even after paganism had ceased to be a menace, the Church militant carried on the war against paganism without respite, and with such success that by the close of the Middle Ages, paganism scarcely retained any foothold in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Towards every form of

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. viii. 5f.; Rom. i. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. vi. 12, Col. i. 3; ii. 15, &c.

<sup>3</sup> See S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions and Christianity* (London, 1925), or S. Cheetham, *Mysteries, Pagan and Christian*, Hulsean Lectures, 1897.

<sup>4</sup> See Justin Martyr, *1st Apol.* lxxii, or Tertullian, *Apol.* xlvi, *De Praesc. Haer.* x.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Murray, in *The History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London, 1929), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> The magistrate who was conducting the examination of Polycarp (A.D. 155) said to him: 'Swear the oath, and I will release you; only revile [λοιδόρησον] the Christ' (*Mart. Polycarp*, § 9).

<sup>7</sup> The Emperor Alexander Severus (c. A.D. 220), who placed in his private shrine an image of Christ, together with those of Abraham, Orpheus and Apollonius, was evidently quite favourably disposed to religious syncretism (see P. J. Healy, *The Valerian Persecution* [London, 1905], pp. 18f.).

<sup>8</sup> See Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. II, chs. ii-iv. The Swedes and the Poles were not converted till the twelfth century A.D. (*ibid.* pp. 142, 175); and the Baltic peoples not till the fifteenth century (p. 194).

non-Christian worship, the Church's attitude remained one of war, and war to the bitter end.

(iii) *Towards non-Christian philosophy.* Between the popular worship of the Greek and Roman deities and the views of the Greek philosophers, there was a great gulf; and it might be expected that the Christians would have viewed the latter more favourably than the former. But with a few exceptions, this was not so.

In the New Testament, pagan philosophy is seen vaguely 'on the horizon', as a potential danger;<sup>1</sup> but its challenge is not countered there with specific arguments. St Paul sometimes uses terms, such as *μορφή* and *σχῆμα*, associated with Greek philosophy and with the mystery-cults, to express truths of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

But in the second and third centuries, the attack upon Christianity from the side of pagan philosophy became so formidable, that an answer from the Church came to be urgently needed; and this was given by the Christian Apologists. Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) dealt with the Gnostic philosophy, condemning it root and branch.<sup>3</sup> Origen made a detailed and reasoned reply to the formidable attack on Christianity by Celsus, who wrote his *True Word* against Christianity in A.D. 178.<sup>4</sup> Others of the Apologists, renouncing argument, simply denounced all philosophy as devilish. For instance, Tertullian:

Where is there any likeness between the Christian and the philosopher?—between the disciple of Greece and the disciple of Heaven?—between one who corrupts the Truth and one who restores and teaches it?<sup>5</sup>

Or again:

Heresies are tricked out by philosophy. Wretched Aristotle!—cunning, shifty, making forced guesses at truth! What has Athens to do with Jerusalem,—the Academy with the Church? Away with those who have brought forward a 'Stoic', 'Platonic' or 'Dialectic' Christianity!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Col. ii. 8; in which Moffatt renders *φιλοσοφία* by 'theosophy'.

<sup>2</sup> See T. R. Glover, *Paul of Tarsus* (London, 1925), pp. 16-23, or J. B. Lightfoot's *Philippians* (London, 1908), pp. 127-33.

<sup>3</sup> *Adversus Haereses*, books i-iv.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., J. Patrick, *The Apology of Origen* (Edinburgh, 1892), or W. Selwyn's translation (Cambridge, 1860). <sup>5</sup> *Apology*, xlvi. <sup>6</sup> *De Praesc. Haer.* vii.

No doubt Tertullian's temperament was exceptionally volcanic; but a large number of the early Christian Apologists substantially shared his attitude towards philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Even St Augustine of Hippo, who in his early days as a Christian had been prepared to see some good in Plato and the greater Greek philosophers, became uncompromising in his later years, insisting that Truth and Grace are to be found only within the fold of the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> The apparent virtues of the heathen (he says) are in reality only 'splendid sins',<sup>3</sup> and the pagan classics are 'a torrent of hell'.<sup>4</sup>

After Augustine, for some centuries the Church paid but little attention to philosophy, and deprecated the study of the Classics.<sup>5</sup> But in the Middle Ages, a 'Scholastic Philosophy' was built up within the Catholic Church. Of this the chief architect was St Thomas Aquinas, who based his system largely on that of Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> We shall be considering the Thomist principles further, when we are dealing with the tradition that Christianity is the fulfilment of other religions. Here it may suffice to note that while the Catholic tradition has welcomed philosophy as a hand-maid of the Church, it has always insisted that philosophy does of itself not suffice for a knowledge of 'saving' truth, and has warned philosophy not to trespass upon the Church's preserves, under pain of anathema.

(iv) *The attitude of Catholic Missions.* The Reformation did not bring about any immediate change in the predominant Christian attitude of hostility to other religions. In the Roman Catholic Church, it was not to be expected that it would do so; but it did evoke the movement known as the Counter-Reformation, which stimulated a fresh enthusiasm for Missions to the heathen. Some of the noblest examples in the whole history of Christendom, of Christ-like self-sacrifice, devotion and heroism are to be found in the lives of some of the Catholic missionaries of the sixteenth

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Tatian, *Ad Graec.* II, III., Athenagoras, *Legat.* XXIII, XXV.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Gibb and W. Montgomery, *The Confessions of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. lix, lxii, in which Augustine's friendly attitude to philosophy in his *Dialogues* (c. A.D. 386) is contrasted with the condemnation of philosophy in his *Confessions* (c. A.D. 400).

<sup>3</sup> *Retract.* I. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Conf.* I. 6.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Deanesly, *History of the Medieval Church* (London, 1945), p. 252: also H. Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* (London, 1927), *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> See the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. XIV, art. 'St Thomas Aquinas'.

century, such as St Francis Xavier in India and Japan, Verbiest in China, or Bartholémé de las Casas in Spanish America. If the 'success' of Missions is measured by the ingathering of converts, these have rarely been more spectacular than those which the Jesuit missionaries achieved in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and if the glory of Missions is sought rather in deeds of succour to the needy, and courageous championship of the oppressed, again the great Catholic missionaries have a record that is unsurpassed.<sup>1</sup>

But the general attitude of the Catholic missionaries towards the non-Christian religions remained as it was before the Reformation. They went out with love for non-Christians in their hearts, but not with any thought of appreciating the non-Christian religions. Their purpose was simply to rescue souls from the clutches of heathenism in this world and from the fires of Hell in the next. They went to give, and not to receive; to save, not to co-operate.

(v) *Attitude of the Protestant Reformers.* As for the Reformers, their view of heathenism was substantially the same as that of their Catholic opponents. On this point, Luther and the Pope showed a remarkable unanimity—except that Luther included the Roman Church within 'heathendom'.

Those who are outside Christianity, be they heathens, Turks, Jews or false Christians [i.e. Roman Catholics], although they may believe in only one true God, yet remain in eternal wrath and perdition.<sup>2</sup>

The same opinion echoed by John Knox, in his *Godly Letter to the Faithful in London*, A.D. 1554:

What is in Asia?—Ignorance of God.

What is in Africa?—Abnegation of the verie Saviour, Our Lord Jesus.

What is in the Churches of the Grecianis?—Mahomet and his false sect.

<sup>1</sup> For the story of Roman Catholic Missions after the Reformation, see, e.g., the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. x, pp. 379 ff. (art. 'Missions'). It has been reckoned that in India, about 1½ million converts were baptized; in China, about 300,000; and in Japan, about 600,000 (Hastings *E.R.E.*, vol. viii, pp. 713-27, art. 'Missions, Roman Catholic').

<sup>2</sup> *Larger Catechism*, II. iii (H. Wace and C. A. Buchheim's translation, *Luther's Primary Works* [London, 1896], p. 106).

What is in Rome?—The greatest ydolle of all uthers, that man of syn!<sup>1</sup>

With regard to pagan philosophy, the Reformers were generally much more hostile than the Schoolmen had been. Luther denounces the medieval universities for ascribing too much authority to Aristotle, in words which sound like an echo of Tertullian:

What are the Universities but schools of heathenish manners? The blind heathen teacher Aristotle rules even further than Christ! . . . God sent him as a plague for our sins!<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, generally speaking, orthodox Protestantism of the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions has regarded philosophy with more suspicion than Catholicism has shewn, and has treated it as a potential enemy of the simplicity of the Gospel. Yet, as we have seen, in spite of the vehement assertion that there is no salvation to be found in other religions, none of the sixteenth-century Reformers would admit that any obligation rested upon them to undertake 'missions' to the heathen.

This tradition of indifference towards the heathen remained predominant in the Protestant Churches till the close of the eighteenth century, when a great wave of missionary enthusiasm swept through European Christendom. In this movement, too, the general attitude of hostility to all non-Christian religions was continued, and indeed provided one of the chief incentives for missionary zeal. Though this was often associated with a tender love for heathen souls, and heroic self-sacrifice for their salvation, it did tend to create a typical 'war-mentality', which exaggerates all one's enemy's faults, and ignores any virtues that he may have. This attitude was not peculiar to missionaries and their supporters, but was common among the scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who undertook the study of other religions.

For example: at the close of the seventeenth century, Dean Prideaux of Norwich wrote *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (1697); and the Rev. A. Ross, in his *Pansebeia* (published in the same year) described Islam as 'damnable'. In the following century, Broughton's *Dictionary of*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *I.R.M.* (June 1942), p. 842.

<sup>2</sup> *To the German Nobility*, vii, 25 (Wace and Buchheim, *op. cit.* pp. 228 f.).

*all Religions* (1745) divides them into two classes: 'True' (Christianity and Judaism) and 'False' (all the rest).<sup>1</sup>

This attitude continued to be prevalent in the early nineteenth century. In 1826, for instance, the Rev. J. Alley published *Vindiciae Christianae*, a vigorous polemic against all non-Christian religions. He dismisses as 'fanciful' all suggestions that there may be any good features in them (p. 10). For himself, he considers philosophy to be 'worse than ignorance', Hinduism 'pernicious and absurd', Islam 'degrading'; and in all of them he finds 'perpetual falsehood, pernicious and extravagant'.<sup>2</sup> Mr Alley's language may strike us as unduly vehement. But he was the Protestant Rector of an Irish parish (Beaulieu, Co. Armagh), and doubtless accustomed to polemical methods of controversy. Even today there are Christians who substantially share his views;<sup>3</sup> and, as our survey in this lecture has shown, they can claim the support of a tradition fairly continuous in the Church from the earliest days.

(vi) *The danger of hatred.* Whatever may be said in support of the attitude of *hostility* towards non-Christian religions, there is undoubtedly a danger that it may develop into one of positive *hatred* towards them, and even towards their adherents, which is quite alien from the spirit of Jesus Christ. This is unmistakable, for instance, in the well-known passage from Tertullian's *De Spectaculis* which Gibbon quoted with glee in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.<sup>4</sup> There Tertullian, after forbidding his fellow-Christians to attend the public shows in the theatres, consoles them for their disappointment by assuring them that at the Last Judgment, a far finer spectacle awaits them.

What will be the scale of that Spectacle? What shall I then be laughing at? What shall I be exulting over? When I see . . . Jupiter and all his devotees groaning together in the lowest darkness!—philosophers 'turning red' before the eyes of their pupils, as they *burn* with them! . . . play-actors, crying out now in *real* pain!—wrestlers, writhing, not in the theatre, but in the fire!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Estlin Carpenter, *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World* (London, 1904), pp. 70 ff.; or his *Comparative Religion* (Home University Library, 1913), pp. 24 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Chs. III and XIII.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I, ch. xv (p. 480 in H. H. Milman's edition, 1846).

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 41 f.

<sup>5</sup> *De Spectaculis*, § 30.

Even St Thomas Aquinas holds a very similar view:

In order that the saints may enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, a perfect sight of the punishments of the damned is granted to them.<sup>1</sup>

A more recent parallel is quoted by Count Petrovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo from a sermon by the Reverend Samuel Hopkins (A.D. 1721-1803), Pastor of Newport (Rhode Island, U.S.A.):

Should the fire of eternal punishment cease, it would obscure the lights of heaven, and put an end to a great part of the happiness of the blessed.<sup>2</sup>

Nor did such feelings find expression only in words. During the suppression of paganism in Europe, Christian Emperors, with the support of the Church, behaved with merciless cruelty to the heathen tribes whom they subdued. In the eighth century, Charlemagne, who bore the title of 'Christianissimus Rex', habitually offered the heathen tribes whom he conquered the stern alternative 'Baptism, or Death!'<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising that they generally expressed their willingness to embrace Christianity, and that innumerable multitudes of them were baptized. But when, a little later, some of these new converts revolted against Charles, he crushed the revolt, beheaded 4500 of them in one day, and then 'went into winter quarters, and there celebrated the birth of our Lord'.<sup>4</sup> 'For', says his chronicler, 'throughout his kingly and imperial career, Charles took the religious part of his duties seriously, and zealously co-operated with churchmen'.<sup>5</sup>

No less merciless was the policy of the Crusaders towards their Moslem foes; and in this case, too, it was regarded as a natural expression of their religious faith.

The knight who joined the Crusades might indulge the bellicose side of his genius under the aegis and at the bidding of the Church. He might butcher all day, till he waded ankle-deep in blood; and then at nightfall kneel, sobbing for very joy, at the Altar of the Sepulchre.<sup>6</sup>

In our day, such ferocity towards persons of other faiths is happily rare among Christians. But there is something akin to it

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III. Suppl. Q. 94, 1. <sup>2</sup> In the *Hibbert Journal* (April 1947), p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hodgkin, *Charles the Great* (Foreign Statesmen Series, London, 1897), pp. 109 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107.  
<sup>6</sup> E. Barker, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1947 ed.), vol. vi, p. 772 a.

in the latent 'anti-Semitism' which still survives in many so-called Christian circles, even in England, and is being fanned today into a dangerous flame by astute politicians, many of whom were loud in their denunciation of anti-Semitism when it was practised by the Nazis. The Amsterdam Conference of 1948, in its report on 'The Approach to Israel', frankly recognized that anti-Semitic prejudice and hatred has not only been one of the darkest stains on the Church's record in the past, but is today a blot on the Church's reputation, and one of the gravest internal dangers to the Christian spirit in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

*The 'Fulfilment' of all truth in Christ*

We saw in Lecture II that today there are many who hold that Christianity comprehends and fulfils all the best elements in other religions. This belief, too, can be traced, almost (though perhaps not quite) continuously throughout the history of the Church.

(i) *The tradition in the Early Church.* We have seen that in the New Testament, it is recorded that Jesus Christ himself claimed to 'fulfil' the religion of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> This is also a central thought in the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>3</sup> St Paul goes further than this, and says that in Christ 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden', and 'all the fulness of the Godhead dwells'.<sup>4</sup>

In the second and third centuries, Justin Martyr and the Christian philosophers of Alexandria applied this idea of 'Christus Consummator' to the relations between the Gospel and pagan philosophy. They maintained that Christ, the eternal Word of God, had been truly 'speaking' in the hearts of great souls, long before the birth of Jesus;—in Socrates and Plato, as well as in Abraham and Moses. They believed that the apparent goodness and truth in these is 'of one essence with' the supreme goodness and truth that is seen in Jesus Christ; so that in the latter, the former is truly 'fulfilled'

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II of the Amsterdam Series, pp. 191-9.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 77-82.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews ix and x, 1-18.  
<sup>4</sup> Col. ii. 3, 9. A similar idea, that Christ is the 'Fulfiller' of all truth and goodness, even among pagans, is implied in St Luke's reports of St Paul's speeches at Lystra (Acts xiv. 15-17), and at Athens (Acts xvii. 23-29). Cf. also Rom. ii. 11-15.

Christ [says Justin] is the reason [λόγος] of whom every race of men partakes; and those who live according to Reason [μετὰ λόγον] are really 'Christians', even though they may be called 'atheists'. Such were Socrates and Heraclitus among the Greeks and others like them; and among the barbarians [i.e. non-Greeks], Abraham, Elijah, . . . etc.<sup>1</sup>

Again:

Stoics, poets, prose-writers, each spoke well [καλῶς], through his share in a little seed of the Divine Reason [άπο μέρους τοῦ σπερματικοῦ θειοῦ λογοῦ]. So, whatever has been spoken well by any men, really belongs to us Christians [ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἔστιν].<sup>2</sup>

A century later, the Christian philosophers of Alexandria, Clement and Origen, endorse this liberal attitude to other religions:

It may be (says Clement) that Philosophy was given to the Greeks directly (by God), and acted as a schoolmaster (έπαιδαγώγαι), to bring the Greek mind to Christ, as the Law brought the Hebrews. . . . All sects of philosophy contain a fragment of truth, broken off from the real Word of God (σπάραγμὸν τινα τοῦ λόγου τοῦ ὄντος).<sup>3</sup>

Unto all men (says Origen) and especially to those engaged in intellectual pursuits—a certain divine influence has been imparted.<sup>4</sup>

Clement maintains that Plato and his followers were able to attain to a knowledge of God as *Father*, though not of the *Son* or the *Spirit*.<sup>5</sup>

The Alexandrians were keenly interested in other religions, and they did not hesitate to describe Christianity itself as a 'mystery religion',<sup>6</sup> or as 'the true Gnosticism'.<sup>7</sup> Clement and Origen were, in later ages, condemned by the Church (Origen in the fifth century, and Clement in the seventeenth) as heretics; but not explicitly on the ground of their liberal attitude to non-Christian philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

(ii) *In the Orthodox Churches of the East.* In the Eastern Churches, this faith in the essential unity of all human life and thought, and

<sup>1</sup> *1st Apol.* xlvi.

<sup>2</sup> *2nd Apol.* xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Strom.* I. 5, 13

<sup>4</sup> *De Princip.* III. 6. Even in his controversial *Reply to Celsus's True Word against the Christians*, Origen emphasizes his conviction that Christianity is essentially related to all Truth, wherever found (J. Patrick, *The Apology of Origen*, p. 316).

<sup>5</sup> *De Princip.* I. 2, II. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Clem. Alex., *Protrept.* XVI; Origen, *Adv. Cels.* III. 519.

<sup>7</sup> Clem. Alex., *Strom.* VI. xiii. 105.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Bampton Lectures, Oxford, 1886), pp. 272-9.

the fulfilment of its best elements in Christ, has been persistent and unbroken. The 'Cappadocian Fathers' of the fourth century quoted freely and appreciatively from Aristotle and Plato.<sup>1</sup> Of Gregory of Nyssa, Dr Srawley has said: 'He deeply imbibed the spirit of Origen, and, like him, he would seek to claim the philosophy of the heathen world as a friend and partner in the pursuit of the higher life.'<sup>2</sup> A modern philosopher, himself belonging to the Orthodox tradition, has maintained that 'the Thomistic distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" does not exist for the Greek Fathers, and is alien to Orthodox thought.'<sup>3</sup>

It is not easy for Western readers to reconcile this broad 'monistic' outlook with the very exclusive claims often made by Orthodox theologians, that the Orthodox Church is the only true Church and the only teacher of truth.<sup>4</sup> But at any rate, a formal recognition of the work of God's Spirit in all creation and all history remains as one of the great principles of Orthodox theology.

(iii) *In Western Catholicism.* In the Western Church, the conception of Christ as 'Fulfiller' is less prominent than in Eastern Orthodoxy.

One might have expected that Augustine's theory that Christianity was the original primitive religion of mankind as a whole<sup>5</sup> would have led him to look for survivals of this in other religions, and the fulfilment of these in the Gospel. But in fact, his mind turned in another direction.<sup>6</sup> He was indeed prepared to see in some of Virgil's poems unconscious but miraculous predictions of the coming of Christ;<sup>7</sup> but he did not suggest that the prediction is related to its fulfilment in any organic way, through the operation of 'one and the self-same Spirit'.

Not till the rise of the Scholastic Philosophy in the Middle Ages do we find in the Western Church the idea of the Fulfilment of other religions in Christ. Of this philosophy, St Thomas Aquinas

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Gregory Naz., *Five Theological Orations*, §§ 8, 9; Greg. Nyss., *De Vit. Moys.*

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Srawley, *Gregory of Nyssa* (Cambridge, 1903), p. xvii.

<sup>3</sup> N. Berdyaev, in the *Ecumenical Review* (Autumn, 1948), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Dr Sergius Bulgakov, in *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1935), says: 'The Church, Truth, and Infallibility are synonymous' (p. 79); and again: 'There is only one true Church, the Orthodox Church' (p. 104). Cf. Fr. Gavin, *Aspects of Contemporary Orthodox Thought* (London, 1923), pp. 252-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Conf.* IX. 32.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Conf.* IX. 28.

(A.D. 1225-74) was the greatest exponent. He adopted from Aristotle the principle of 'analogy' (that is, a certain measure of likeness) between man and God, and between human reason and Divine Truth.<sup>1</sup> From this, it followed that in 'Natural Religion' (which man can acquire for himself by means of his own reason) there are certain elements of truth. These truths are indeed only partial, and not of themselves 'sufficient unto salvation', until supplemented by truths of Revelation; but they are true, as far as they go.<sup>2</sup>

St Thomas Aquinas' great works, the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, have always been regarded as of the highest authority in the tradition of Catholicism.<sup>3</sup> This may partly account for the fact that, in spite of the theoretical rigidity of its dogmas, Catholicism has in practice been more sympathetic than Protestantism in its attitude to non-Christian forms of worship.<sup>4</sup> Catholic missionaries have often been pioneers in adopting non-Christian customs, and 'baptizing' them into the Church. Sometimes this has gone so far that it has been checked by higher ecclesiastical authorities;<sup>5</sup> but it has been supported by some Catholic theologians of high repute. Notable among these was the Jesuit Cardinal de Lugo (A.D. 1583-1660) who was reckoned by St Alphonsus de Liguori as 'the greatest Catholic philosopher after St Thomas Aquinas'.<sup>6</sup> He maintained that

the members of the various Christian sects, of the Jewish and Mohammedan communions, and of the non-Christian philosophies, who achieved, and achieve their salvation, do so by God's grace aiding their good faith to practise those elements in the cultus and teaching of their respective sects which are true, good, and originally revealed by God.<sup>7</sup> It would, I think, be difficult to find any pronouncement by any

<sup>1</sup> See the articles 'Analogy', in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. i, pp. 449 ff.; or in Hastings E.R.E., vol. i; also E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (London, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> *Summa Theol.* i. 1; *Summa contra Gent.* i. 2 (translations by the Dominican Fathers, London, 1911-25).

<sup>3</sup> See the article on Thomas Aquinas in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. xiv. Cf. above, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. C. Bouquet's Hulsean Lectures, 1924 (*The Christian Religion and its Competitors*), pp. 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. the Pope condemned the 'adoption' of ancestor-worship by the Catholic missionaries in China.

<sup>6</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. ix, pp. 418 f.

<sup>7</sup> *De Fide, Disputations* xix. 7, 10, and xx. 107, 194.

theologian, Roman or non-Roman, more generous than this in its attitude to the non-Christian faiths. Moreover, a great Roman Catholic philosopher of our day, Baron von Hügel, has endorsed this passage of de Lugo's, and says:

Such a view in no way levels down or damps the missionary enthusiasm. Buddhism does not become equal to Mohammedanism, nor Platonism to Christianity, nor Lutheranism to Catholicism. It merely claims that everywhere there is *some* truth, and that this truth comes originally from God, and that it is usually mediated to the soul by traditions, schools, churches. We thus attain an outlook generous, rich, elastic; yet also graduated, positive, unitary, and truly Catholic.<sup>1</sup>

Another Roman Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, is no less liberal:

The saying 'No Salvation outside the Church' can shock only those who are ignorant of 'the soul of the Church'. All it means to us is, that there is no salvation outside the truth. . . . Every man of good faith and right will, provided he does not sin against the light, and does not refuse the grace offered to him, belongs to the Soul of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

How far such sentiments would be endorsed by the highest ecclesiastical authorities, may be open to question; but so far, they do not seem to have brought upon those who profess them the official condemnation of the Church.

It must be admitted that in practice, neither the Catholicism of the West nor the Orthodoxy of the East have shown towards the non-Christian religions the sympathy which the words of Berdyaev or von Hügel would lead us to expect. But the fact remains that the principle that all goodness and truth find their highest fulfilment in Christ is accepted in theory by the ancient Churches of Eastern and Western Christendom.

(iv) *In the Churches of the Reformation.* We have noted that the combative spirit of the great Continental Reformers did not predispose them to look for any good features in the non-Christian religions, which might be 'fulfilled' in Christianity.<sup>3</sup> But the sixteenth century produced a renaissance of learning, as well as a reformation of doctrine; and this in turn led to a general

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1921), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Redeeming the Times* (London, 1943), pp. 105 f.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 116 f.

broadening of outlook, and in particular to a revived interest in 'classical' pagan literature.<sup>1</sup> Often, this interest was merely antiquarian, and devoid of any truly religious motive. But in the case of one great 'son of the Renaissance', Erasmus, the new learning was linked with a truly Christian spirit. He was definitely prepared to associate 'Christ' with movements outside the Church, and to see the fulfilment of these in the Gospel: 'It may be that the Spirit of Christ goes further than we think, and that there are many in the fellowship of the Saints who are not in our Catalogue.'<sup>2</sup> It would appear that Erasmus even applied this belief to his devotions; for it is reported that when 'telling his beads', he used to include the petition: '*Sancte Socrates, Ora pro nobis!*'<sup>3</sup>

It is also of interest to note that while the orthodox Reformers refused to support missions to the heathen, the 'liberal' Erasmus had a genuine 'missionary concern'. He desired to see the Scriptures translated into many tongues, 'so as to be known not only by the Scotch and Irish, but by the Turks and Saracens'.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of the fulfilment of all truth in Christ appears again in the seventeenth century in England, when the Cambridge Platonists endeavoured to revive the spirit and teaching of the Alexandrian philosophers of the third century, and insisted that in religion, it is the spirit that matters, rather than the name or label. They refused to limit the sphere of God's operations to any organized Church or society, and styled Plato 'a Greek Moses', maintaining that God had given to him a genuine revelation of Divine Truth.<sup>5</sup> But there seems to be no evidence that the Cambridge Platonists ever undertook a study of the non-Christian religions.

In the eighteenth century, among the Latitudinarians and Deists, 'broad-mindedness' was extolled as perhaps the greatest of virtues. But in spite of this, it was generally assumed that real culture and wisdom were not to be looked for outside Europe. In England, at any rate, the majority, whether orthodox or 'broad-minded',

<sup>1</sup> For the Renaissance, see, e.g., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. viii, ch. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Archbishop Söderblom, in *The Living God* (Gifford Lectures, 1933), p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by C. J. Cadoux, in *Evangelical Modernism* (London, 1938), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by R. K. Murray, *Erasmus and Luther* (London, 1920), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., the article 'Cambridge Platonists' in *Hastings E.R.E.*, vol. iii, pp. 167-73; or W. R. Inge's Hulsean Lectures for 1925 (*The Platonic Tradition in English Thought*).

remained so confident of the superiority and uniqueness of the Christian religion, that for nearly three centuries after the Reformation, hardly any serious or sympathetic study of other religions was attempted by professing Christians. The few who did so were either so orthodox that they dismissed all other religions as 'false',<sup>1</sup> or else they themselves were somewhat lax in their adherence to the Christian Faith. Among the latter was Lord Herbert of Cherbury (A.D. 1583-1645), who was a pioneer in the study of comparative religion in England. In his book *De Religione Gentium* he comes to the somewhat tepid conclusion that 'Christianity is on the whole the best religion'.<sup>2</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the Low Churchmen were accused by the High Churchmen of 'laying the main stress on National Religion, and withal so magnifying "the Doctrine of Sincerity" as in effect to place all religions on a level'.<sup>3</sup> But their emphasis was more towards a depreciation of the claims of Christianity to be a unique Revelation, than towards an appreciation of other religions as genuine, if lesser, revelations of God.<sup>4</sup>

At most, it was sometimes admitted that Islam, with its proclamation of one God, was deserving of some respect. We may recall Dr Johnson's reply to Boswell, when the latter expressed a desire to travel, and see something of other lands and other religions: 'Sir, your desire is a laudable one.—Of the religions of the world, Christianity and Mahometanism are worthy of attention. The rest are barbarous'.<sup>5</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the idea of 'Fulfilment in Christ' came definitely to the fore again. The way for this had been prepared by some of the eighteenth-century philosophers on the Continent, such as Lessing and Herder, with their insistence on the 'organic unity' of all history as the field of God's operation.<sup>6</sup> They hardly stood within the orthodox Christian tradition. But

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> D.N.B. (1885 ed.), vol. xxvi, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Creed and J. S. Boys Smith, *Religious Thought in the 18th Century* (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 31 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Tindal, for instance, maintained that 'The Law of Nature is sufficient to make a man acceptable to God' (in *Christianity as Old as Creation* [1730], quoted by Creed and Boys Smith, *op. cit.* p. 40). This implicitly denied that salvation can be obtained only through Christianity.

<sup>5</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Birkbeck Hill's ed.), vol. iv, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 105.

in the early nineteenth century, similar ideas began to spread in Christian circles. For instance, Wordsworth, in his *Excursion*, writes:

Spirit knows no insulated spot,  
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link  
It circulates, the Soul of all the World (ix. 13).

If so, then the non-Christian religions cannot be ‘insulated’ from the operation of God’s Spirit, nor separated by a ‘chasm’ from the realm of revelation and covenanted grace. A similar view of the unity of all life finds expression in S. T. Coleridge’s poem *The Destiny of Nations*, written in 1796:

Glory to thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!  
All-conscious Spirit of the Universe!  
Nature’s vast Ever-acting Energy!  
In will, in deed, impulse of All to All! (ll. 459–63).

Half a century later it appears again in Alfred Tennyson’s *The Higher Pantheism*:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains,—  
Are not these, O soul, the vision of Him who reigns?

With these poets, the motive is no doubt emotional, rather than scientific. But their general outlook on life received strong reinforcement in the mid-Victorian age, from the theory of evolution,<sup>1</sup> which appeared to confirm, in the name of Science, the intuition of the poets that there is an organic unity underlying all creation—and therefore, all religions. Though this did not quickly penetrate into Church-circles in general, it did influence the minds of a few outstanding Christian theologians.

A notable instance of this appeared in 1840, when Frederick Denison Maurice, in his Boyle Lectures on *The Religions of the World*, deprecated the wholesale condemnation of all non-Christian religions, and suggested that the aim of Christian Missions should be, not only to destroy the evil, but also to preserve the good that is to be found in the higher religions of the Orient (p. 60). Again, in the following year, Thomas Carlyle startled the English public with the suggestion that Mahomet, who had

<sup>1</sup> Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published in 1859.

always been dismissed as a mere 'false prophet', ought really to be reckoned among 'God's Heroes'.<sup>1</sup>

Views such as these, however, remained the exception, rather than the rule, in Christian circles in the nineteenth century. It was not till the early years of the twentieth century that the idea of the 'fulfilment' of other religions in Christianity rose suddenly into popularity in Church circles, and for a time almost displaced the older tradition of uncompromising hostility. The story of this development, and of the subsequent swing of the pendulum in the direction of a more vigorous assertion of the contrast between Christianity and other religions has already come before our notice.<sup>2</sup> But our brief survey of the past in this lecture will have shown that the more appreciative attitude, which welcomes the good elements in other religions, and at the same time claims that all these are fulfilled and transcended in Christ, is by no means a modern innovation. It is not, indeed, so continuous, nor so dominant, as the attitude of hostility; but it can fairly claim to have a well-established place within the tradition of the Church.

#### *Inter-religious co-operation*

The trends of thought which we have so far been considering have all unquestionably had a recognized place within the Christian tradition. But what of co-operation with other religions, with a view to mutual enrichment of life? Of this, there are very few instances in the history of the Church. Origen did indeed maintain that it is the duty of the Christian philosopher to 'co-operate' with non-Christian philosophers, and blames the latter for their unwillingness to reciprocate in this matter.<sup>3</sup> But at the same time, he insists that 'in no respect is philosophy superior to Christianity';<sup>4</sup> and this would seem to exclude the possibility of any real *mutual* contribution.

In the eighteenth century, Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa was fully prepared to recognize elements of truth in non-Christian religions,

<sup>1</sup> *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841). T. R. Glover considered that this was 'a landmark' in the history of the Christian attitude to other religions (*The Jesus of History*, p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 47-52.

<sup>3</sup> *Contra Celsum*, III. 81, IV. 83. See J. Patrick, *The Apology of Origen*, p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> *Contra Celsum*, IV. 83.

and his philosophy of unity even led him to advocate a League of Religions.<sup>1</sup> But his attitude was unusual; and I know of no accredited Christian teacher before the nineteenth century who openly advocated genuine inter-religious co-operation, based on the readiness to admit that Christianity may have something to receive, as well as to give. Occasionally a philosopher or scientist, nominally Christian, laid down principles which might seem logically to point towards such co-operation. But for the most part, these discreetly refrained from pursuing their theories into the realm of practice, where they might have incurred the anathemas of the Church.

There have indeed been Churchmen who have been careful to show respect to the non-Christian faiths. Such was Cardinal de Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers from 1867-82, who when passing a mosque, used to alight from his carriage and walk past it barefoot.<sup>2</sup> But this, though a singularly gracious gesture of courtesy, did not involve any surrender of the Christian claim to supremacy; for the Cardinal was a zealous and successful missionary, who won many converts from Islam.<sup>3</sup> More significant is the fact that in the nineteenth century, there were some European scholars who, though brought up in the Christian tradition, came to find greater solace and satisfaction in other faiths. Among these, in the early part of the century, were Schlegel and Schopenhauer; also Heinrich Heine (d. 1860), of whom it was said that 'his spiritual home was on the banks of the Ganges'.<sup>4</sup> Later, Max Müller, Amiel, Roman Rolland and many other European scholars all testified that they owed a supreme debt to Hindu philosophy.<sup>5</sup> But none of these could be called representative Christians, or exponents of the distinctive tradition of the Church.

There was, however, one voice in the nineteenth century, coming from within the ranks of the ordained ministry of the Church, which set forth the ideal of a world religion of the future

<sup>1</sup> See H. Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London, 1932), pp. 102, 202, or P. de Gandillac, *Nicolas de Cues* (Paris, 1941), pp. 40 f., 246.

<sup>2</sup> See von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses* (London, 1920), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. IX, pp. 50-2.

<sup>4</sup> N. Macnicol, *Is Christianity Unique?* (London, 1935), p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> See Macnicol, *op. cit.* pp. 15-17, 79-93; also the *Life of Max Müller* by his wife, (London, 1902), vol. II, pp. 247, etc.

in terms which implied that this would be achieved by genuine inter-religious co-operation and mutual contribution. The seer of this vision was Dr George Matheson, the blind poet-mystic of the Church of Scotland, widely known and loved as the author of the hymn 'O Love that wilt not let me go'. In his poem 'One in Christ', published in 1889, he prays:

Gather us in, Thou Love that fillest all;  
 Gather our rival faiths within Thy Fold; . . .  
 In diverse forms a common Soul we see;  
 In many ships we seek one spirit-land.

Thine is the mystic life great India craves;  
 Thine is the Parsee's sin-destroying beam;  
 Thine is the Buddhist's rest from tossing waves;  
 Thine is the Empire of vast China's dream;  
 Gather us in!<sup>1</sup>

Not, be it noticed, 'Gather *them* in'!—i.e. into the fold of the Catholic Church of the future (as envisaged by Bishop Montgomery and his collaborators in *Mankind and the Church*)<sup>2</sup>—but 'Gather *us* in', Christian and non-Christian, into a larger fold than has yet been offered by any one of us. Such a conception went far beyond any previously put forward by a Christian minister; and it is surprising that it did not draw upon Dr Matheson the censure of his Church. But it seems to have aroused neither criticism nor echoes;<sup>3</sup> and in the sixty years that have followed the writing of that hymn, it has remained almost a solitary voice from within the Church.

For the last hundred years, the majority of Christian theologians, both in England and on the Continent, even when they have shown no active hostility towards non-Christian religions, have tacitly left them out of account, in their anticipations of the future of religion, and have certainly not looked to them for any real contribution towards a wider understanding of Truth.<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> Hymn no. 497 in *Songs of Praise*; also in the Congregationalist and Baptist Hymn-Books.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 48 f.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Macmillan, *Life of George Matheson* (1907).

<sup>4</sup> Of Ritschl, for instance, it has been said: 'For him, other religions simply did not count' (J. M. Creed, *Hulsean Lectures*, 1936, p. 100).

seems, therefore, clear that inter-religious co-operation has in the past had little or no place in the history of the Church. If it is to be justified today, this will have to be on the basis of an appeal to the fundamental principles of Christ's message, and not on the authority of the Christian tradition.

But while co-operation, with the deliberate intention of learning something from other faiths, has hardly ever been practised by Christians, it is evident that a good deal of unconscious and unavowed borrowing has taken place. The old paganism of the Roman Empire, though vanquished by the Church, did affect the life and thought of the Church in many ways. For example, the worship of images, which the earlier apologists had denounced with unsparing severity, won for itself such complete recognition in the Church that after the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth century, all who opposed it were reckoned as heretics.<sup>1</sup>

Many old pagan cults and customs were quietly adopted by the Church. Some of the old deities were 'canonized' in the Church's Calendar of Saints, under slightly changed names. Quirinus became 'St Quirino' of Siena; Perun the god of lightning, 'St Elijah'; Volas, god of flocks, 'St Bradius'.<sup>2</sup> The external rites of the Church became outwardly more like those of the old 'Mysteries',<sup>3</sup> though it is not always certain from which side the 'borrowing' took place. 'In one point', says Dr Edwyn Bevan, 'there seems no doubt that the Church did borrow from Mithraism—in the fixing of Christmas Day on December 25th, the Birthday of the Sun.'<sup>4</sup> But in all this, there is no indication that the Church was deliberately or consciously imitating pagan customs; still less do we find any admission by the authorities of the Church that they were really borrowing anything from non-Christian sources.

<sup>1</sup> For the Iconoclastic Controversy, see, e.g., J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (London, 1889 ed.), vol. II, bk. VI, chs. III and IV. The naïveté of the medieval worship of images is illustrated by the fact that the same images to which prayers were offered as deities were afterwards soundly chastised by their devotees in punishment, if the prayers were not answered (G. C. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, pp. 186 f.).

<sup>2</sup> See Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. II, pp. 413 ff.; or A. S. Rappoport, *Mediaeval Legends* (London, 1934), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> See S. Cheetham, *Mysteries, Pagan and Christian* (Hulsean Lectures for 1896-7), pp. 73-7; and cf. Percy Gardner, in *Hastings E.R.E.*, vol. IV, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> In *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London, 1929), p. 103.

## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

Our brief survey of the traditional Christian attitude to other religions has shown that in it many strands of thought are interwoven. The recognition of this will guard us against the danger of claiming for some one-sided view the authority of the Church as a whole, and entitling it *the* Christian view, as though none other were permissible. Our survey has also indicated some of the really permanent and fundamental principles of the Gospel which need to be safeguarded, and which we shall have to bear in mind in our next Lecture, as we endeavour to get back to the 'first principles of Christ'. Above all, it has shown that in spite of the errors and sins of Christian folk, the Spirit of Christ has never wholly forsaken his Church; and that in the unbroken continuity of the Spirit we can find assurance and confidence wherewith to face the days to come.

LECTURE V

THE RECOVERY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES



## LECTURE V

### THE RECOVERY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

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In the preceding lectures we considered first the situation with which the Church is to-day confronted, and we then looked back, to see what may be learnt from the experience and authority of the past; primarily from the message of Jesus Christ, and secondarily from the tradition of the Christian Church. In the two remaining lectures we shall turn our thoughts to the future, and endeavour to see what conclusions may be drawn from the facts that we have reviewed, both with regard to the principles on which the Christian attitude to other religions should be based, and to the policy and practice that should ensue.

In the past, the Church's attitude to other religions has generally been determined more by the needs or impulses of the moment than by fundamental principles. Sometimes the Church has been forced to adopt a certain attitude by the challenge of a rival religion or by the pressure of political power. Sometimes a certain policy has been based on isolated proof-texts, or on the decrees of Church Councils. Sometimes it has sprung from an instinctive dislike of the unfamiliar, or it may be from an equally instinctive desire for novelty; sometimes from a compassion for lost souls, or, it may be, from a sense of kinship with all mankind. These motives are legitimate enough. But unless there is also some understanding of the deeper issues and principles involved, the ensuing policy is liable to lack consistency and stability, and will shift its course with the varying winds of external politics or internal emotions.

In the past, there have been comparatively few attempts to consider the fundamental principles that should govern the Christian attitude and policy towards other faiths of mankind. There have indeed been some pioneers in this field, such as Origen

in the third century, and St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth.<sup>1</sup> In our age, we are indebted to the Roman Catholic Church for some careful studies of missionary principles; particularly Fr. Schmidlin's *Catholic Mission Theory and Practice*,<sup>2</sup> and Père Charles's *Theology of Missions* (1947).<sup>3</sup> On the Protestant side, Dr Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938) is recognized by all—including those who differ from its conclusions—as a masterly attempt to grapple with fundamental principles. But with all these writers, the theological principles upon which they base their conclusions do not command general assent among Christians; and the lament of Dr Gustav Warneck, nearly half a century ago, still applies to our present situation: 'Scientific theology has never been signalized by *animosity* towards Missions; but it has eminently *ignored* them. The Universities have given us neither a scientific History of Missions nor a Theory of Missions.'<sup>4</sup> A few attempts have indeed been made to supply the need;<sup>5</sup> but the majority of the Church's ablest thinkers and scholars have not felt drawn either to undertake foreign missionary service, or even to study the larger issues involved in the missionary enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

In this lecture we shall consider first of all whether there are any 'missionary principles' which all, or nearly all, Christians accept as fundamental; then certain other principles, which are maintained as essential by some groups of Christians, but questioned by others; and finally some of the larger problems in the realm of theory, which confront the Church on the mission-field; reserving for our final lecture a consideration of the more practical problems.

#### THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST

We have several times noted that the supremacy of Jesus Christ and his message is a principle logically inherent in the use of the

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 103 f., 115

<sup>2</sup> Techy (U.S.A.), 1931.

<sup>3</sup> Eng. trans. by M. R. Adleshaw (London, 1947).

<sup>4</sup> *A History of Protestant Missions* (Eng. trans. Edinburgh, 1901), p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. H. V. White, *A Theology for Missions* (New York, 1937), written broadly from the standpoint of Liberal Protestantism, and more concerned with social and cultural values than with theology proper; also Bishop Geoffrey Allen's *Theology of Missions* (London, 1943)—slight, but useful. Roland Allen's *Missionary Principles* (London, 1913) deals with practical, rather than theological, issues.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop W. H. Frere noted this, in *The Missionary Motive* (London, 1913), p. 104.

name 'Christian' by any individual or group; and that this principle has, in fact, been accepted, with very few exceptions, in every branch of the Christian Church, *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*.<sup>1</sup>

A recognition of supremacy is not, however, identical with some other claims that are often associated with it—such as the claim for its exclusiveness (that outside Christ there is no other revelation of God), or for its exhaustiveness (that in Christ all that can be known of God is fully revealed), or for its finality and absolute-ness. These claims will shortly call for our consideration.<sup>2</sup> For the present, in affirming the supremacy of Christ, we mean simply this—that we believe that in him we find the *highest* and *fullest* truth about God and man—a *central* truth, that must determine our judgments on all the major issues of religion, and a *distinctive* truth, that is not found with equal clearness elsewhere. This is not a mere platitude which can be taken for granted.<sup>3</sup> But on the whole, I believe that the verdict of history supports Dr Latourette's judgment: 'Types of Christianity which have failed to stress the centrality of Jesus as God's Christ have not shewn the power to reproduce themselves through many centuries.'<sup>4</sup>

In Lecture III, we made it clear that our interpretation of the message of Jesus Christ is based upon the view that, whatever may be the doctrinal interpretation of Christ's person and teachings, it is beyond reasonable doubt, as a matter of history, that he did proclaim a message in which certain main principles are clearly discernible; and that a Christian, as long as he claims to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, must accept these principles as his highest standard. Let us then first recall the main principles which we found to be integral to the message proclaimed by Jesus, and take these as our guide to the Christian attitude to other religions.

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 33 f., 39, 107 f.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 143-59.

<sup>3</sup> It is challenged by those who, with David F. Strauss, maintain that 'the true God-man is no one person, but humanity as a whole' (quoted by H. R. Mackintosh, in *Types of Modern Theology* (London 1937), p. 118); and by those who, with Rudolf Eucken, bid us look for higher manifestations of God in the future (see his *Truth of Religion* [London, 1911], p. 363). Cf. also B. Bosanquet, *Science and Philosophy* (London, 1927), pp. 345 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. vii, p. 482.

## PRINCIPLES CLEARLY TAUGHT BY JESUS CHRIST

*Faith in a living, personal God*

That Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels, believed in God as a living Being, able to speak to man, to answer man's prayers, and to influence the course of events in this world by acts of divine free-will, is beyond question. There is no trace in his recorded words of the philosophic attitude which calls the Supreme indiscriminately either 'He' or 'It';<sup>1</sup> nor is there any suggestion that God is so completely dominated by the laws of the universe that he cannot modify these by any kind of 'miracle' or free-will act. Philosophies which identify God with 'the world-process' are completely alien to his mind. Archbishop William Temple was surely right when he said that for a Christian, it may be quite permissible to conceive of God as '*super-personal*'; but not as impersonal, or as in any way *less* personal than ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Herein there is a definite contrast between Christ's view of God and the predominant philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism.

*Faith in a God who is righteous and loving*

The God whom Jesus Christ worshipped is not a 'pure Absolute', beyond Good and Evil, or including them both equally within himself.<sup>3</sup> He is a God with a definite moral character, who fulfils the highest Hebrew conceptions of 'the LORD', but in whom the Old Testament attribute of justice, though not abrogated, is transcended by the New Testament attribute of fatherly love.

If so, all tendencies to exalt naked force, rather than love, as the ultimately decisive factor in history, involve a denial of this fundamental principle of Christ.<sup>4</sup> So does any encouragement of the war-attitude, or the spirit of hatred, either towards individuals or even towards systems. In this respect, Christians—including missionaries—in the past have often failed to be true to the principles of Christ.<sup>5</sup> But today, most of the leaders of missionary

<sup>1</sup> As Radhakrishnan does, in his *Indian Philosophy* (London, 1923), vol. I, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *William Temple and his Message* (Pelican Books, 1945), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> As in the *Bhagavadgita*, IX. 16-19, X. 25-40.

<sup>4</sup> As in the 'totalitarian religions'; see above, pp. 11 f.; also, to some extent, in Islam, and in the theology of Calvin and some of his modern followers.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 118 f.; and below, pp. 182-7.

thought seem determined to abandon the way of pugnacious controversy, and to seek methods more in harmony with the spirit of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

*The unity of mankind*

We saw in Lecture III that Jesus always ignores, and sometimes explicitly challenges, the barriers which human convention has erected within the human family, between persons of different classes, sexes or creeds, and deals with them all impartially as human beings.<sup>2</sup>

Behind this attitude of his, there lies (if we accept the evidence of the Gospels) the conviction that there is 'something of God in every man',<sup>3</sup> because God is the Creator and Father of all. He appeals constantly to the element of goodness and truth that is in the heart of every man; and he seems to expect to find in all whom he meets, a 'spark' of faith, ready to respond to his appeals. 'If thou hast faith, all things are possible to him that believeth';<sup>4</sup> 'Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?';<sup>5</sup> In St John's Gospel this is explicitly based upon the fundamental truth that *every* human soul is enlightened by the Divine Word, and has therefore within itself 'something of God'.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, Jesus regards mankind also as united in *sin*. To him, the most unpardonable characteristic of a human being is self-satisfaction;<sup>7</sup> and to every individual whom he meets, he comes with an offer of salvation and a note of urgency. He believes that all men need to be saved, and that no man can save himself by his own efforts. He realizes that the salvation man needs is not primarily from external dangers, or from particular

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. (i) The Edinburgh Conference Report, 1910: 'In all lands, the iconoclastic attitude is condemned as radically unwise and unjust' (vol. iv, p. 267); (ii) *Essays Catholic and Missionary* (1931): 'The attitude of contempt [towards other religions] is dangerous' (Miss Evelyn Underhill, p. 3; cf. the essay by Bishop W. V. Lucas of Masasi, pp. 122 ff.); and (iii) Bishop W. W. Cash of Worcester, in *Christendom and Islam* (1937): 'I came to realize the utter futility of it [controversy], and ultimately to discard it entirely, as a method of approach to Moslems' (p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 87-9.

<sup>3</sup> An old watchword of the Quakers. See *That of God in Every Man*, by R. M. Chetsingh (Hoshangabad, India, 1943).

<sup>4</sup> Mark ix. 23,

<sup>5</sup> Luke xii. 57; cf. Matt. xvii, 20, etc.

<sup>6</sup> John i. 9; cf. x. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Luke xviii, 9-14 ('The Pharisee and the Publican'); cf. John ix. 41, 'Ye say, We see; your sin remaineth'.

breaches of this or that law of God; but fundamentally from the powers of evil within his own heart, and his consequent sense of estrangement from God. 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts . . . &c.; these defile a man.'<sup>1</sup>

This fundamental principle of the unity of mankind—all human beings alike being God's creatures and children, all alike sinners, and all alike capable of salvation—brings a challenge, both to many non-Christian religions, and to some who call themselves Christians. It does not call upon us to ignore the real and unmistakable differences that exist within the human family. But any religion which either in theory or in practice limits itself to a certain section of humanity, and treats other human groups or individuals as outside the range of God's loving purpose, or as so essentially inferior that they are incapable of growing into higher religious experiences—that religion stands condemned by the standard of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The same condemnation must fall upon every religion that makes light of human sin as something we need not worry about,<sup>3</sup> or encourages us to believe that we can save ourselves from it by our own will-power, assuring us that 'God's a good fellow, and 'twill all be well!' That is contrary to the fundamental principle of Christ, that every human being needs a God-given salvation, and also is capable of receiving salvation.

#### *The value of the individual*

This is another principle which stands out clearly in the Gospels. We find there that Jesus Christ dealt almost entirely with individuals; never with 'mankind in the mass'. He inaugurated no great scheme of social reform, or political revolution, or ecclesiastical mass-movements from one religion to another. His chief

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> This is largely true of orthodox Hinduism, which has always limited itself to one race (the people of India), and has in practice treated the Outcastes as 'beyond the pale' of God's care. See Mrs Sinclair Stevenson, *Beyond the Pale* (Calcutta, 1930). It is also true of some types of organized Christianity. See below, pp. 185 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Swami Vivekananda, speaking at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, addressed his audience thus: 'Sisters and Brothers of America! . . . The Hindu refuses to call you sinners.—"Sinners"? It is a *sin* to call a man so!' (Report [ed. Dr J. H. Barrows, Chicago, 1893], p. 15).

interest was in *persons*, in the relationship of 'I' and 'thou', and of the individual soul to God.

This does not mean that he endorsed what is sometimes called 'the democratic faith' that every human being is of *equal* value.<sup>1</sup> That dogma (even in its religious form, that 'every soul is of equal value in the sight of God') is surely a figment of the pious imagination, as remote from the realities of life as the dogma that all religions are of equal value. What Jesus evidently did believe was, that every human person has a real and distinctive value in the sight of God, and ought not to be treated merely as a pawn in a great game of politics, civil or ecclesiastical. If so, this too gives us Christians a test by which we may appraise not only the historic non-Christian religions, but also the political totalitarian religions of our day—not to speak of historic Christianity, in some of its forms.

*The method of dealing with men by love*

In all Christ's dealings with individuals, he showed a respect for their personalities. He refrained from any attempt to force his will upon them, but sought to draw from them a voluntary acceptance of his demands. If they did not respond, he passed on.<sup>2</sup> He refused to adopt the methods either of political action<sup>3</sup> or of supernatural miracle,<sup>4</sup> in order to bring in the Kingdom of God; but he followed the ideal of the Suffering Servant,<sup>5</sup> believing that only as a crucified Messiah would he be able 'to draw all men to himself'.<sup>6</sup>

Here again is a test by which the Christian may judge all religions. Do they seek to achieve their ends by methods of mass-suggestion and the stimulus of fear and hate, or by the quiet appeal to the individual reason and conscience? Do they rely on methods of force and compulsion, of threats or bribery, or do

<sup>1</sup> See the address by Dr W. Pauck, of Holland, at the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1948; *Amsterdam Series*, vol. II, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Mark vi. 5: 'He could do there no mighty work, because of their unbelief. . . . And he went round the [other] villages.'

<sup>3</sup> Mark xii. 17; cf. John vi. 15: 'When he perceived that they would make him a king, he departed alone.'

<sup>4</sup> Mark viii. 12; ('There shall no sign be given to this generation'); cf. Matt. xxvi. 53.

<sup>5</sup> See Mark ix. 12; x. 45; Matt. viii. 17.

<sup>6</sup> John xii. 32.

they trust to the attractive power of good words and good deeds? Do they pay lip-service to ideals of humility only as long as they themselves are subject to persecution, and then adopt methods of persecution, as soon as they find themselves in a position of power?

*The ultimate triumph of good over evil*

Whatever precise interpretation we may put upon Christ's message of the Kingdom of God, it is certain that this involved the faith that somehow, at the end, God's purpose will prevail, and his rule will be established. As Christians, then, we may also ask of other religions whether they encourage this confident faith; or whether they are content to picture history as meaningless, or as an endless repetition of purposeless cycles?<sup>1</sup>

Further, it is surely impossible to confine the idea of the Kingdom of God within the limits of earthly chronology or geography: and so it needs some conception of an 'other world' beyond this earth for its realization. Hence, any religion or philosophy which confines its message to this world, and allows no place for any 'heaven' or 'hell' or 'life beyond the grave' (however these may be pictured) is irreconcilable with the essential principles of Jesus Christ.

That these principles which we have been considering were, as a matter of historical fact, laid down by Jesus Christ, would, I think, be agreed by the majority of New Testament scholars. Those who question them do so more on the basis of certain dogmatic presuppositions, than on the ground of historical evidence.<sup>2</sup>

If these principles are seriously laid to heart, it will be found that they are by no means mere platitudes. They will certainly not lead to the conclusion that 'one religion is as good as another'—or as foolish as another. They will challenge many accepted conventional ideas and practices in all religions, and perhaps endorse

<sup>1</sup> As in the philosophies of the Stoics, the Hindus, or (in modern times) of Thomas Hardy and Bertrand Russell.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. the Barthians challenge the doctrine that there is 'something of God in every man', (in spite of Biblical passages such as John i. 9, Acts xvii. 28), on the ground that it is excluded by the dogma that God is entirely 'other than man'. See below, pp. 152 ff.

## THE RECOVERY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

some that are not usually associated with any religion. If put into practice, they would, in some respects, 'turn the world upside down'. These practical consequences will engage our attention in our next lecture.

## FURTHER PRINCIPLES ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIANITY

There are many Christians who will agree that the principles which we have been considering are inherent in Christ's person and message, and may rightly be used by Christians as standards by which to judge other religions; but they will maintain that these principles do not, by themselves, give an adequate definition of the Christian Revelation; that Christian faith involves more than the recognition of Christ's supremacy, after the manner in which we have defined this; and that further definitions are essential. These definitions are of various kinds; and they bear directly upon the Christian attitude to other religions. They call therefore for our careful consideration, one by one.

*That the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is complete  
and exhaustive*

This is the principle which underlies the theory of the 'fulfilment' of all truth in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It does not deny the existence of truth, or even of revelation, outside the Christian tradition; but it maintains that all these truths are comprehended and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It therefore decisively rejects the suggestion that the Christian religion can be in any way enriched by contact with other faiths.

At the Jerusalem Missionary Conference of 1928, a veteran American missionary-leader, Dr Robert E. Speer, put this point of view with admirable clarity:

There is no truth anywhere which is not in Christ, and in Christ in its fullest and richest form. . . . Not only are all the truths of the other religions in Christianity, but they are balanced and corrected, as they are not in the non-Christian religions.<sup>2</sup>

There can be no doubt, I think, that by 'Christ', Dr Speer here means the historic Jesus, and that by 'Christianity' he means the

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 47-52, and 120-7.

<sup>2</sup> Report, vol. I, pp. 428 f.

historical religion that has sprung from him. This is also the view of Barth: 'God has revealed himself to man in Jesus Christ. What do we know from any other source of God? . . . Absolutely nothing!'<sup>1</sup> Or again: 'The *whole* revelation of God is contained in Jesus Christ.'<sup>2</sup>

Can this view claim to be the one and only legitimate Christian interpretation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? It has undoubtedly held a recognized place in the Christian tradition throughout the ages;<sup>3</sup> and if it is interpreted in the sense that in the whole of God's 'Word' (or self-expression to man), all truth so far made known to man is contained—then it is beyond reasonable question.

But sometimes the advocates of this view seem to suggest that the Christian faith in the Godhead of Jesus requires us to affirm that the terms 'Jesus', 'Christ', 'The Word of God', and 'God', are all interchangeable, and identical in meaning. This, however, is neither Scriptural nor Catholic. In St John's Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying: 'My Father is greater than I',<sup>4</sup> and in the *Quicunque Vult* we are told that the Son is 'inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood'. St John also clearly teaches that the 'Word' (*Logos*) of God operates beyond the historic person of Jesus, from the beginning of Creation;<sup>5</sup> and St Paul affirms that 'Christ' was with the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai.<sup>6</sup>

It is therefore not only legitimate, but essential, to distinguish between the total 'Word', or self-expression, of God—which must surely be conceived of as perfect—and the historic revelation in Jesus. This distinction is clearly recognized in the Report of the Archbishop's Commission on *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938). In this, after warning us that the 'perfection' of Jesus Christ must not be conceived of in such a way as to exclude the reality of his 'growth' in wisdom and knowledge, it is added:

Nor is it to be maintained that every sort of human excellence is found in Christ. His mission was that of Messiah, not that (for example) of a statesman or of an artist. . . . There is no reason to attribute to Him the special excellences appropriate to functions that were not His.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gifford Lectures, 1937-8, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 120-7

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. x. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Credo* (Eng. trans., London, 1938), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> John xiv, 28.

<sup>6</sup> John i. 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Report, p. 76.

## THE RECOVERY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

Now, if we are not to expect to find in Jesus 'every sort of *human* excellence', *a fortiori* we shall not expect to find in him all the infinite attributes of the Divine; and in that case, the revelation of God in him cannot be a complete revelation. This was clearly affirmed by Prof. J. M. Creed, in his Hulsean Lectures for 1926:

Christian theology need *not* claim that the Christian religion contains within itself *all* truth, or even all truth that is of religious value. But [he adds] if it loses the conviction that in Christ it has found the deepest truth of God, it has lost itself.<sup>1</sup>

Also by Baron von Hügel: 'The Unincarnate God has a wider range, though a less deep message, than the Incarnate God':<sup>2</sup> and by Bishop A. E. F. Rawlinson of Derby: 'What Christianity claims for the revelation in Jesus Christ is supremacy, not monopoly of truth'.<sup>3</sup> Or once more, by B. H. Streeter:

Incarnation purports to be, not an *exhaustive*, nor an *exclusive*, but rather a *distinctive* expression of God. It must mean an expression through human personality of the very being of God,—and of the most characteristic and central element in that being. It does not mean that everything in the Divine finds expression there; or that nothing in the Divine is expressed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

Harriett Hamilton King has given poetical expression to a similar idea:

God has other Words for other worlds;  
But for this world, the Word of God is Christ.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this principle, it is possible for a Christian to hold firmly to the essential Christian principle of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and at the same time to approach the non-Christian religions with an open mind that has not rejected, on *a priori* grounds, the possibility that they may have something to contribute to our knowledge of God, and may have been used by him as real (even if subordinate) channels of Divine Revelation.

We turn now to a further principle that is sometimes maintained.

<sup>1</sup> *The Divinity of Christ* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays on the Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1921), p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Authority and Freedom* (London, 1924), p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> *Adventure* (London, 1927), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> *The Sermon in a Hospital*.

*That the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is final and absolute for all time*

At first sight, this may appear closely akin to the principle (which we have just been considering) of the *completeness* of the Christian revelation; and in fact, the two dogmas have been commonly held together. But the insistence on finality goes further; for it affirms, not only that the revelation of God in Christ contains all the truth about God that has ever been made known to man in the past, but also that no further truths ever will or can be made known in the future.

This insistence on the absolute finality of Christianity has undoubtedly been a central feature of the Christian tradition. It is found in the early Fathers, in the medieval Schoolmen, in Eastern Orthodoxy, in the Protestant Reformers, and in the great majority of modern exponents of the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> The present-day tendency to lay increasing emphasis upon this is reflected in the Reports of the International Missionary Conferences of the last forty years:—(i) The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 noted that the emphasis on the finality of the Christian Faith was ‘universal and emphatic’;<sup>2</sup> (ii) At the Jerusalem Conference in 1928, Bishop William Temple maintained that ‘The whole significance [of Christianity] depends on its claim to be absolute and final’;<sup>3</sup> and (iii) At the Tambaram Missionary Conference in 1938, many spokesmen of the ‘Younger Churches’ of the East were specially emphatic on this point. Prof. T. C. Chao of China said: ‘The crucial question is, whether the revelation of God in Christ is unique and once for all. Upon this depends the validity of the Gospel.’<sup>4</sup> And Prof. D. G. Moses of Nagpur (an outstanding Indian Christian philosopher) said: ‘If this conviction [that Christianity is a final revelation from God] dies out, Missions will decay.’<sup>5</sup> The finality of the Incarnation in Christ is also a funda-

<sup>1</sup> Among modern writers, see, e.g., (i) Liddon’s Bampton Lectures, 1866; (ii) the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. vii, p. 790, art. ‘Infallibility’; (iii) Dr Alex Martin, *The Finality of Jesus* (Edinburgh, 1933); or (iv) J. Baillie (in *I.R.M.* [Oct. 1947], pp. 452 ff.), on ‘The Given Word—the Message of the Unvarying Gospel’.

<sup>2</sup> Edinburgh Conference Report, vol. iv, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem Conference Report, vol. i, p. 469.

<sup>4</sup> Tambaram Conference Report, vol. i, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66.

mental of Emil Brunner's teaching: 'The unique and unrepeatable character of revelation constitutes the essence of Christianity. . . . A final event can only happen once.'<sup>1</sup> The obverse side of this affirmation is a vehement denunciation of 'Relativism'. Dr Kraemer, for instance, speaks of our modern world as being 'under the victorious but dreadful dominion of Relativism', which lies like an 'abyss' before mankind today.<sup>2</sup>

Now what precisely is meant here by the term 'Relativism'? Sometimes it is used to denote an attitude of radical scepticism, which questions the existence of any ultimate standards of Truth, Beauty or Goodness. A Relativism of that kind certainly tends to produce an attitude of uncertainty towards all the problems of life, and is irreconcilable not only with Christianity, but with any kind of religious faith, or indeed with any kind of worth-while living and striving. Aldous Huxley has spoken of 'the poisonous nature of the fruits' of such an attitude, which he himself once held, but has now abandoned.<sup>3</sup>

But Relativism may also be used to denote a recognition of the fact that in all human thinking and in all human judgments, there is of necessity an element of imperfection, which is less than absolute and final truth; and that it is impossible to eliminate this relative element from any human thinking or speaking. 'Religious belief', says Prof. C. H. Dodd, 'is, even more than scientific propositions, subject to relativity. The religious man, like the man of science, should be aware that the best statement he can make to himself is nothing more than a very inadequate symbol of ultimate reality.'<sup>4</sup> Is Relativism, in this sense, inconsistent with Christian faith?

No Christian who reverences the tradition of the Church would wish lightly to challenge its strong and continuous insistence on the final and absolute quality of the historic Revelation in Jesus Christ. But those who uphold that this is essential for Christian faith may fairly be asked to bear in mind (and to suggest answers to) the following considerations:

<sup>1</sup> *The Mediator* (Eng. trans.), pp. 25 f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ends and Means* (London, 1937), p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> *The Authority of the Bible* (London, 1928), p. 20.

(i) It will be generally agreed that 'finality' and 'absoluteness' are, by their very nature, beyond proof by the ordinary methods of reasoning or evidence. 'It is a mistake', says Prof. A. E. Taylor, 'to suppose that the unique cosmical significance that Christianity attaches to its Founder can be sustained by a simple induction from the recorded events of his earthly life.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, it can only be affirmed by 'an act of faith'—not therefore necessarily illegitimate, but an act that goes beyond what the actual evidence justifies, and is therefore difficult to commend to the acceptance of those who at present are viewing the matter from outside.

(ii) A claim to finality has been made by nearly all the great religions. It is made by orthodox Judaism on behalf of the Mosaic Law:

God, the immutable, gave us an immutable Law.—No other Law will be revealed by the Creator.<sup>2</sup>

Also by Islam:

The Holy Q'uran claims that it came as a judge to decide the differences of the various religions, and as a perfect revelation of the Divine Will.<sup>3</sup>

And again by Hinduism:

The highest knowledge of ultimate truth and reality was regarded as having been once for all declared in the Upanisads.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that these claims cannot all be absolutely true; for there are obvious points of contrast between the doctrines of these religions at certain points. So when a similar claim to final truth is put forward by Christians, an inquirer may fairly ask, On what grounds is this claim to be preferred above the others?

(iii) Not infrequently, the advocates of 'finality' seem inclined to resent any such question; and instead of attempting to answer it, they take refuge in vehement denunciations of those who question their thesis. Even Dr Kraemer—usually the most scholarly and courteous of controversialists—at times displays a tendency in this direction, refusing to put forward reasoned arguments, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith of a Moralist* (London, 1930), p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> M. Friedlander, *A Textbook of the Jewish Religion* (London, 1896), pp. 45 f.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ali, *A Translation of the Holy Q'uran* (Lahore, 1928), p. xxviii.

<sup>4</sup> S. N. Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1922), vol. I, p. 41.

denouncing those who differ from him as 'stupendous and incredible' persons.<sup>1</sup> Dr D. R. Davies, a champion of 'the New Orthodoxy', is even more violent. He styles Christian liberalism 'an aberration and an abortion'; and while admitting that he 'tends to be bitter and unjust' to it, he makes no effort to moderate his denunciations.<sup>2</sup> Such petulant intolerance on the part of the advocates of finality does not serve to commend the sobriety of their judgments to those who differ from them; and it tends to create the impression that they are virtually claiming for their own judgments something very like infallibility.

They themselves would doubtless vehemently repudiate this, and would say that, on the contrary, they are contrasting human imperfection with Divine perfection and finality. Most of them today have abandoned the old claims which ascribed final perfection to the Bible, or to the Church as it exists on earth; but they are all the more insistent in claiming this on behalf of Jesus Christ, as the Word of God. The Jerusalem Conference of 1928 took for its slogan: 'Our Message is Jesus Christ!'<sup>3</sup> and this was interpreted by Dr R. E. Speer to mean that 'Christ is sufficient, absolute, and final Saviour; . . . There can be no revelation displacing or supplementing the revelation in Him.'<sup>4</sup>

Now the problem which confronts us here is in some measure similar to that which we discussed in connexion with the 'completeness' of the Revelation in Christ.<sup>5</sup> With regard to 'the Word of God'—viewed as God's total 'message' or 'self-expression' to man,—we agree that this, as it comes forth from God, must be conceived of as partaking of the Divine qualities of perfection and finality. But we have seen that it is no mark of true orthodoxy simply to identify the historic Jesus with the totality of the Word of God. 'Christianity', says Bishop Barry of Southwell, 'has never affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth, in the days of His flesh, is God's final Word in human history.'<sup>6</sup> 'It is absurd', says Archbishop Söderblom of Upsala, 'to look upon revelation as finished with Christ.'<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Continuity*, p. 8; cf. *The Christian Message*, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *On to Orthodoxy* (London, 1939), pp. 9, 103. <sup>3</sup> *Report*, vol. 1, p. 480. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 343, 345.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 143-5. <sup>6</sup> *The Relevance of the Church* (London, 1935), p. 70.

*The Living God* (Gifford Lectures, 1931), p. 351.

In face of such statements by responsible Christian leaders of to-day, it can hardly be assumed without question that the finality of the revelation in Jesus Christ is an essential part of the Christian faith.

Further, it must be realized that, however perfect and final 'the Word of God' is, as it comes forth from God, as soon as it enters within the sphere of our apprehension, a human factor of response comes into play; and in everything human, there is an element of imperfection. So, whenever we define where the Word of God is, or is not, to be found, our human judgment enters into this pronouncement; and to claim 'finality' for this is to claim for ourselves an infallibility which belongs only to God.

We have seen how Dr Brunner, for instance, asserts that belief in the finality of the Christian revelation 'constitutes the essence of Christianity'.<sup>1</sup> But we are surely entitled to ask, *How* does Dr Brunner know this so positively, except by the exercise of his own reason (or, it may be, 'intuition');—and is that absolutely infallible?

All this warns us at least to scrutinize carefully the confident statement often made today, that no one can be a true Christian unless he accepts the finality of Jesus Christ.

(iv) Nor is the argument that a belief in the finality of Christianity is 'essential for effective missionary work' really conclusive. Is it necessary for a doctor to claim that his medical science is perfect and infallible, before he answers a call to help those in need, or those whose medical resources he believes to be inadequate and definitely inferior to his own? Why should it be otherwise in religion? Fr. Schmidlin is surely right when he says that a conviction of 'relative superiority' is sufficient to justify the proclamation of a higher truth to those who lack it.<sup>2</sup> Prof. J. Dewey, in his Gifford Lectures for 1929, goes further, and maintains that if Religion were freed from 'its ineffective quest for certainty', it would actually gain in vital activity.<sup>3</sup> Whether this would be so or not, may be open to question. But in any case, a claim of this kind ought not to be made simply from motives of expediency,

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Catholic Mission Theory*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> *The Quest for Certainty*, p. 289.

## THE RECOVERY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

unless it is (as far as we can judge) also true. Many superstitions have been most effective in winning converts for a time; but in the long run they bring injury and not strength to their adherents.

(v) What then? Are we driven back to the insecurity of Relativism? Certainly not in the sense that we renounce all attempts to form and express judgments of value, or all faith in the reality of final ideals. We believe that God, acting and speaking through Jesus Christ in a unique manner, has shown us the way towards these ideals, and gives us grace and light to walk in that way.

If we are asked, do we regard this revelation as final? we would answer: Yes, in the sense that for us it is completely *satisfying*. We cannot conceive of a more perfect revelation of Divine Love than that which was given by Jesus Christ through his life and death, nor any higher expression of this than in the traditional Christian affirmation: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.' We have no desire to look beyond Christ for another; we desire to commend him to our fellow-men as God's Supreme Word to all mankind, and we would express our devotion to him in terms of absolute and final loyalty.<sup>1</sup>

But we do not feel bound by this to deny that any true revelation of God has ever been given in the past apart from the historic revelation in Jesus Christ; nor to attempt to bind the future within the terms of the past, by affirming that no further revelation ever can be given. For us, it is sufficient that in relation to ourselves, we have known him as Saviour, Lord, and Son of God.

Meanwhile, we would 'pursue the Absolute through the relative',<sup>2</sup> and endeavour to maintain 'Continuity of Thought through Relativity of Expression'.<sup>3</sup> For

Now we see through a glass, darkly;  
But then, face to face.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Substantially, this seems to be very near to the definition of the finality of Christianity given by Dr A. C. Bouquet: 'I believe in the historical career of Christ . . . as the decisive point in the intercourse between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. I believe that this gives us the fixation and definition of the character of God, as personal, unique, eternal, living, and holy love' (*Is Christianity the Final Religion?* [London, 1921], p. 300).

<sup>2</sup> E. Troeltsch, in *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte*, as summarized by A. C. Bouquet, in *Is Christianity the Final Religion?* p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> W. Sanday, *Form and Content in the Christian tradition* (London, 1916), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. xiii. 12.

We pass now to another definition sometimes insisted upon which is:

*That the Christian revelation is exclusive, and 'entirely other'*

According to this view, the Incarnation and Revelation of God in Jesus Christ is so essentially different 'in kind' from all other divine operations (such as God's work in creation, in nature, in history, and in individual human souls) that it may be described as the one and only real 'act of God', on this earth; or at least, as the one and only occasion on which God has 'come' in person to this earth.

Many modern theologians assume that this is the essential significance of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. It is set forth uncompromisingly by Karl Barth, particularly in his *Credo* and in his Gifford Lectures.<sup>1</sup> 'The fundamental conviction of Barth is that there is no direct continuity between the creature and the Creator, and that the idea of 'organic relation' between God and man is the very fountain of error.'<sup>2</sup> Brunner, too, maintains that between the 'unique' event of the Incarnation and all other operations of God, there is 'no historical continuity of revelation', but rather 'a difference of quality', or at most only 'a paradoxical unity'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, an Anglican writer, S. F. Davenport, in his Norrisian Prize Essay for 1924, says: 'Between inspiration—even unique inspiration—and Incarnation lies an unfathomable barrier';<sup>4</sup> and Archbishop William Temple, in *Christus Veritas*, speaks of the Incarnation as 'the breach of an otherwise universal law, as complete as would be a total reversal of the law of gravitation'.<sup>5</sup>

Now this doctrine of the Incarnation obviously leads to the

<sup>1</sup> *Credo* (Eng. trans., London, 1936), pp. 38, 135; *Gifford Lectures* (1937), p. 43. Recently an ultra-orthodox American writer has attacked Barth and Brunner for not going *far enough* in this direction; maintaining that 'the wholly Other' of Barth and Brunner resembles 'the wholly Similar' of Schleiermacher! (C. Van Til, *The New Modernism*, London, 1946, p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> J. McConnachie, *The Barthian Theology* (London, 1931), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *The Mediator* (London, 1924), p. 25; *The Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1937), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Immanence and Incarnation* (London, 1925), p. 20. Cf. D. R. Davies, *On to Orthodoxy*, pp. 163, 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Christus Veritas* (London, 1924), p. 217. It is not easy, however, to reconcile this passage with the general trend of Temple's earlier philosophy; e.g., 'The Life of Christ is a momentary expression of eternal truth, . . . of what is always true' (*The Universality of Christ* [London, 1921], p. 69).

theory of discontinuity between Christianity and all other religion.<sup>1</sup> There can then be no *comparison* possible between the Christian Revelation and any other religion, still less any 'fulfilment' of other religions in Christianity; and even the attempt to evaluate other religions by the standards of Christ's message becomes inadequate and irrelevant. The task of the Christian missionary is then simply to *confront* all men with the proclamation of an entirely unique event, in which God has acted and spoken once for all, and only once, on the stage of human history.

But can this conception of the Incarnation, as the irruption of a wholly foreign God into a world which otherwise has no contact with him, and the consequent 'discontinuity' of the Christian Revelation, be maintained as an essential Christian doctrine? Can it be reconciled with the teaching of Jesus Christ? Surely his central teaching that God is our Father implies a 'family likeness' between God and man?<sup>2</sup> Barth, indeed, maintains that when Jesus spoke of God as 'our Father' he meant something 'different altogether' from human fatherhood.<sup>3</sup> Now no one will deny that Divine Fatherhood far transcends human fatherhood; but to deny any common element between them is surely to make nonsense of the Gospels, and indeed of the whole basis of the New Testament. For our Lord constantly *likened* the Kingdom of God to things earthly; and St Paul affirms that 'every family in heaven and earth derives its name and nature from the (Divine) Father.'<sup>4</sup>

If this idea of a 'wholly other' God is not truly Scriptural, neither is it truly Orthodox, nor truly Catholic. It is certainly completely alien to the main tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which goes back to St Athanasius's famous epigram: 'God became man, in order that we might become divine',<sup>5</sup> and is reaffirmed today by Orthodox theologians of repute.<sup>6</sup>

What of the tradition of the Western Church? At first sight,

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 43-7.

<sup>2</sup> T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History*, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> *Credo*, p. 23; Gifford Lectures, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iii. 15 (Moffatt); cf. Rom. i. 11-15; and Acts xvii. 24-31, xiv. 17. (Even if the speeches in Acts have been 'edited', they represent the faith of the early Church.)

<sup>5</sup> οὗτος ἐνανθρώπησεν ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεωτοπόμονεν (*De Incarnatione*, lxxv. 3).

<sup>6</sup> e.g. S. Bulgakov, in *Revelation* (ed. J. Baillie and H. Martin, 1937) says: 'The Incarnation is not only an event which took place once for all, but an act which goes on continually' (p. 177).

there may seem to be a certain affinity between this dualistic view of the Incarnation and the scholastic philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, which draws a sharp line between reason and revelation, between the natural and the supernatural. But in Scholasticism, and in the Catholic tradition which has sprung from it, the antithesis is modified by the principle of Analogy, which (as we have already seen)<sup>1</sup> recognizes a certain measure of similarity and correspondence between the two spheres; so that revelation, while it supplements and corrects reason, does not contradict it. But in spite of the revival of 'Thomism' today, even this 'modified dualism' is being challenged, from more than one side. On the one hand, Barth denounces the whole principle of Analogy as 'a doctrine of Anti-Christ';<sup>2</sup> and from another angle, Dr Leonard Hodgson (now Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford), holds that 'the Thomist theory of the two spheres of reason and revelation cannot be maintained'.<sup>3</sup>

Still more decisive is the rejection, by many theologians, of the Barthian dualism between the Incarnation of God in Christ and all other forms of Divine activity.

Sir W. H. Moberly, in 1913, maintained that the true key-note of the relation between the Incarnation in Jesus Christ and God's work in general is, not 'discontinuity', but 'organic unity'.

The Incarnation and the Atonement are permanent elements in the life of God. . . . World-history is something in which He genuinely partakes. . . . Man is bound to God;—and this relation is grounded in the very nature of God Himself.<sup>4</sup>

Archbishop Söderblom set forth a similar view in his Gifford Lectures for 1931. He maintained that while we, as Christians, certainly regard the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as a 'special revelation', in which God has shown us His 'heart', yet this is not to be severed from the rest of God's revelations to us in Nature, in history, and in the other religions of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> J. McConnachie, *The Barthian Theology*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1943), pp. 21 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Foundations*, pp. 510 f.

<sup>5</sup> *The Living God*, *passim*, esp. p. 378. In every Church-tradition, there are many who support this view. Among Anglicans, we may quote:

(a) Dean Hastings Rashdall: 'It is impossible to maintain that God is fully incarnate in Jesus Christ, and not incarnate at all in anyone else' (*God and Man* [Oxford, 1910], p. 75).

(contd. on next page)

Enough has been said to shew that the doctrine of the entire 'other-ness' of the Christian Revelation can certainly not claim the support of the Christian tradition as a whole. Indeed, in its extremer forms, it displays the one-sidedness typical of heresy. But even heresies often witness to forgotten truths; and in this one we may find a useful reminder that if the Christian message is worth holding and proclaiming, there must be in it an element distinctive and unique. To say: 'Jesus was Son of God;—but so are we all!' is definitely sub-Christian; for there is really no reason for calling ourselves 'Christians', unless we find in Jesus Christ something *more* of God than we find anywhere else—more than in Nature, more than in History, more than in any other individual human being.

Undoubtedly, through Nature God reveals to us his beauty, wisdom, and power; but not his goodness, or his love. 'There is much of Nature which it is not possible to construe in terms of a Divine Providence such as is revealed in the personal experience of salvation.'<sup>1</sup> Turning to History, it may be possible to discern the law of justice operating on the large scale; but here, the conflict between good and evil is more evident than the triumph of the good: 'Beyond question, there loom through History, as the general shape of a mountain might loom through the mist, certain broad contours of judgment which in some degree point in the direction of the righteousness of God. Beyond that, the facts hardly entitle us to go.'<sup>2</sup> It is only in Jesus Christ, interpreted by

(b) Canon Oliver C. Quick: 'The Life of Jesus is the supremely characteristic act of the universal activity of God in manhood' (*Liberalism, Modernism, and Tradition* [London, 1923]).

(c) The Archbishops' Commission Report on *Doctrine in the Church of England*, 1938: 'The Incarnation belongs to the activity of God in History. . . . God acted through Christ, and He still acts through Christ' (p. 74).

Among Presbyterians, Dr John Baillie: 'The true Christian theology has never been, that God is incarnate in Jesus alone, but that in Him, He was incarnate supremely' (*The Interpretation of Religion* [Edinburgh, 1929.] p. 469).

Among Roman Catholics, Jacques Maritain, in his *True Humanism* (Eng. trans., London, 1938), affirms 'the humanism of the Incarnation', whereby 'the sovereign love [of God] comes down, and makes, in man and with man, a work that is divinely human' (pp. 65, 67).

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Farmer, *The World and God* (London, 1935), p. 277. Cf. B. H. Streeter, in *Reality* (London, 1927), ch. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Farmer, *op. cit.* p. 290. H. Butterfield, in *Christianity and History* (London, 1949), suggests that in the issue of the two world wars of this century, we may discern a 'judgment of God' upon German militarism; but we must realize that the same judgment must fall upon militarism in our own, or any other, country (pp. 48-52).

Christian faith, that we gain a clear vision of Love, self-sacrificing and ultimately victorious, at the very heart of the Universe, and belonging to the very essence of God.

We pass now to consider another claim sometimes made on behalf of Christianity.

*That the Christian revelation is 'embodied' in the Bible or in the Church*

(i) *Revelation in the Bible.* The Roman Catholic Church still teaches officially that the whole Bible is the infallible Word of God to man. 'The inerrancy of the Bible follows as a consequence of its Divine authorship. Whenever a sacred writer makes a statement as his own, this statement is infallibly true, whatever be the subject-matter.'<sup>1</sup> A similar view of the Bible was formerly general among Protestants,<sup>2</sup> but is now confined to 'Fundamentalist' circles. A larger number today find the infallible Word of God within the Bible, but not in every part of it.<sup>3</sup> Anglo-Catholics and Orthodox ascribe infallibility to the Creeds of the Church,<sup>4</sup> and to the decisions of General Councils.<sup>5</sup> All such theories make some fixed form of words an essential test by which to judge other religions, and refuse to recognize any religion which does not subscribe to this form. Such views are open to criticism on two grounds:

(a) They ignore the human (and therefore, fallible) element, which cannot be eliminated from any words spoken or written by man, unless God were to use the speaker or writer as a mere passive tool; and this would be contrary to the principles laid down and the methods used by Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. II, p. 543 *a*, art. 'Bible'.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Burgon, preaching in 1860 before the University of Oxford, said: 'We hold the Bible to be, not generally inspired, but particularly; not some parts more, some less, but all equally—the words, as well as the sentences of it; the letters, as well as the syllables;—absolute, faultless, unerring, supreme' (*Inspiration and Interpretation* [Oxford, 1861], p. 94). In the 1943 edition of Dr Young's Concordance of the Bible, we read in the Preface: 'The original scriptures have God for their author, and truth, without a mixture of error, as their matter.'

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Brunner, in *The Theology of Crisis* (New York, 1929), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. N. P. Williams, in *Form and Content in the Christian Tradition* (London, 1933), pp. 30-3. <sup>5</sup> e.g. S. Bulgakoff, in *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1935), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> John xv. 15; cf. Rev. iii. 20. See above, p. 141.

(b) They assume that God gives his highest revelation in the form of fixed words, or pieces of information, rather than through a living human person.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, no one of these views to-day commands the general assent of Christians, or can claim consequently to determine the one and only 'Christian' attitude to other religions.

(ii) *Revelation as embodied in a visible Church.* In recent years, the revival of emphasis upon the doctrine of the Church as 'integral to the Gospel' is one of the most significant trends of theology. It always has been a central feature of the Catholic tradition; and in the Middle Ages, this culminated in the dogma (still officially held by the Church of Rome) that the true Church consists only of those who acknowledge the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff.<sup>2</sup> This logically involves the condemnation of all non-Roman missions as unauthorized by Christ. 'The only true Missions', says Père Charles in his *Theology of Missions*, 'are those of the Catholic Church, whose Head is the Pope.'<sup>3</sup>

This view also leads to the conclusion that the vital dividing-line lies, not between 'Christian' and 'non-Christian', but between 'Catholic' and 'non-Catholic'. Fr. George Tyrrell, with his clear logical mind, saw this, and stated it with his usual indiscreet frankness: 'Jesus would say that Harnack was "not far from the Kingdom of God"; but that "a miss is as good as a mile"; that there was no difference between Protestants and savages; all would burn in Hell alike.'<sup>4</sup> Christians of other denominations will probably demur to this; but some of them have defined the visible Church with scarcely less rigidity. The Eastern Orthodox maintain that they alone constitute the Church of Christ.<sup>5</sup> The Anglican Tractarians held that the Catholic Church consists only of those bodies with an unbroken episcopal succession—the Roman, Orthodox, and Anglican Communions,—and in England, of the

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop William Temple was fond of insisting that 'there is no such thing as revealed truth', nor 'infallibly accurate information' (*William Temple* [Pelican Books, 1946], pp. 88 f.). Cf. Rashdall, in *Philosophy and Religion* (1909), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *I.R.M.* (July 1942), p. 176. Cf. the article 'Church' in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. III, pp. 744-60.

<sup>4</sup> M. D. Petre, *The Life of George Tyrrell* (London, 1912), p. 400.

<sup>5</sup> Bulgakoff, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 104.

Anglican alone.<sup>1</sup> As for the Protestant sects, the Tractarians held that 'they lie between us and heathenism'.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to orthodox Protestantism, we find that Luther maintained that 'outside Christendom, there is no forgiveness, and can be no holiness';<sup>3</sup> and he excluded the Pope from the true Church, as firmly as the Pope excluded him.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the Reformed Churches have laid down certain doctrinal tests as essential for 'the Church'.<sup>5</sup> Even the World Council of Churches, by requiring all those whom it admits to its membership to assent to the formula 'Jesus is God', has thereby excluded some, such as the Unitarians, who would certainly desire to be reckoned as 'Christian'.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that some of the leading Protestant speakers at the Amsterdam Conference in 1948 laid great emphasis on the absolute necessity of the Church. Bishop Aulen, of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, said: 'Christ and the Church belong together as an inseparable unity. . . . Christ is incarnate in the Church.'<sup>7</sup>

The Oriental delegates at Amsterdam were no less insistent upon this. For example, Dr Paul Devanandan:

What makes the primary difference in outlook between the leaders of a previous generation, in the younger Churches, and those who are the leaders today, is that they [the latter] perceive no mere 'consequential relation' between Gospel and Church, but a relation that is both integral and constitutive.<sup>8</sup>

But as soon as we begin to ask *what* and *where* is 'the Church'? we meet with a bewildering variety of answers from Christian people. These in turn lead to conflicting attitudes and policies towards the non-Christian religions. For if Christ dwells exclusively (or even in special measure) within a particular organization, the primary object of Christian missions must be to bring

<sup>1</sup> See Tracts v, xi, xv; and cf. V. F. Storr, *English Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1913), pp. 261-5. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Tract xlvi.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Greater Catechism*, art. iii, 'The Creed'; Wace and Buchheim's translation (London, 1896), p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102: 'Under the Papacy, there was no Holy Spirit, and hence no Christian Church.'

<sup>5</sup> Numerous examples will be found in B. J. Kidd's *Documents of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford, 1911).

<sup>6</sup> Dr G. Harkness (in *I.R.M.* [1939], p. 515), describes this basis as 'exclusive rather than ecumenical'. <sup>7</sup> *Amsterdam Series*, vol. i, p. 19. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 149.

the convert within this visible 'Ark of Salvation', by means of the authorized Rite of Initiation. And since the devotees of each 'ark' generally maintain that no other secure ark exists, the relations between these various groups of Christians is not one of co-operation, but rather of rivalry and strife. Meanwhile, the non-Christian is inclined to dismiss the claims of all the Churches, as nullified by these rivalries and mutual inconsistencies.

The root-fallacy of all attempts to ascribe final divine authority to any existing Church-organization lies in the failure to distinguish between the Ideal and the Actual. The ideal Church (as the Body of Christ) could not be other than perfect and infallible. But to make this claim for any body of Christian people as they exist in the world, is again to ascribe divine qualities to human beings. And is not that, as the New Orthodoxy (in this matter) rightly maintains,<sup>1</sup> the most fundamental of all sins?

We pass now to consider some other matters of principle, on which there is wide divergence of opinion among Christian people—a divergence which leads to conflicting attitudes towards other faults.

#### THE PROBLEMS OF TOLERANCE AND IMPARTIALITY

These two are closely connected, but distinct. They raise two main questions: (i) Is tolerance a virtue for Christians, or a vice? and (ii) is impartiality possible, or even desirable?

##### *The problem of tolerance*

Should the Christian attitude to other religions be marked by a spirit of toleration? For the first seventeen centuries or so of Church history, the answer to that question by the great majority of Christians would certainly have been 'No!' Occasionally, a Hilary, or an Alcuin, or a Raymond Lull protested against the attempts to win converts to Christianity by methods of force;<sup>2</sup> but even that in no way implied any toleration of non-Christian doctrines or practices. Moreover, those who advocated toleration

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., D. R. Davies, *Down Peacock's Feathers!* (London, 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Hilary, *Ad. Constant.* vi. For Alcuin and Raymond Lull, see, e.g., G. F. Maclear, *A History of Christian Missions in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1863), pp. 222, 354 ff.

in theory were often far from tolerant in practice.<sup>1</sup> In general, Catholic and Protestant, Anglican and Puritan alike never doubted that it was their duty as Christians not to tolerate but to overcome those whose opinions they held to be false.

Not till the seventeenth century was tolerance held forth as a commendable virtue. A pioneer in this was Locke, in his *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689). But even Locke wished to exclude atheists and Roman Catholics from toleration. Then gradually this view became more widespread, till in the nineteenth century 'toleration' became one of the watchwords of Christian liberalism.<sup>2</sup> A reaction against it set in with the Tractarians, which to some extent continues today.<sup>3</sup> But even now, the charge of intolerance is generally resented by the average man.

Amid these conflicting views, where does the Christian path lie? Few will deny that in the past, religious intolerance has often been a very evil thing. It has generally sprung from ignorance and prejudice; it has been fed by fear and pride; and it has brought forth cruelty and injustice. The reaction against it has been on the whole legitimate and rightful. On the other hand, tolerance is, at best, a negative and nerveless virtue. It leads to no decisions; it inspires no enthusiasms. Moreover, have we any right to tolerate things essentially evil and false?

We have seen that Jesus Christ, with all his gentleness and love, was by no means always tolerant, but at times his condemnations were severe and scathing.<sup>4</sup>

Where then lies the right path for a Christian? On the one hand, it is good for all of us that, knowing the imperfections of our human nature, we should realize, when we are confronted by views that we do not share, that it is possible that it is we who are mistaken; and we should not be hasty to condemn that which

<sup>1</sup> Compare Tertullian's fine plea for tolerance in his *Apology* with his fierce intolerance in *De Praescript. Haereticorum*, vii, xv. Similarly Sir T. More, in spite of the principles laid down in his *Utopia*, advocated the persecution of Protestants (see M. Creighton, *Persecution and Tolerance* [Hulsean Lectures, London, 1895], pp. 104-8).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., W. E. H. Lecky's *History of Rationalism in Europe* (London, 1865), especially ch. iv, 'The History of Persecution'.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar wrote, in *Christ and His Critics* (London, 1919), p. 127: 'Liberalism is a lying spirit in the mouth of God's priests and prophets.'

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 80 f., 111.

(it may be) we do not appreciate merely because we do not understand it aright. A measure of suspended judgment is often the mark of wise man. On the other hand, when our mind and conscience definitely adjudge certain things to be false or wrong, we have no moral right to tolerate them. 'Toleration', as Dr Kraemer has truly said, 'must be based on Truth.'<sup>1</sup> And this is nowhere more important than in the study of other religions.

We turn now to another question.

*The problem of impartiality*

In the nineteenth century, the duty of impartiality was generally accepted as a truism, too obvious to need defence. Of late, however, the ideal of impartial judgment, especially in matters of religion, has been subjected to severe criticism, not only from the standpoint of pure scepticism, but also from that of Christian orthodoxy. It is argued that since we are all dominated by inhibitions, complexes and prejudices, it is a mere delusion for us to imagine that we can divest ourselves of these and attain to an objective view of truth. As Christians, then, we are urged to abandon the pretence of being impartial, and simply to affirm the Christian message, without argument. Pope Leo XIII, in his Encyclical of 1899, said: 'Dogmatic facts in history impose themselves on faith, and no man may call them in question.'<sup>2</sup> That is, in effect, to make historical investigation subject to given 'dogmas', and gives justification for Dr C. C. J. Webb's charge against the Church of Rome, that 'it regards the *truth* of doctrines as merely irrelevant'.<sup>3</sup> Nor is the technique of 'affirmation without discussion' confined to Roman Catholic writers. We find something like it in a well-known Methodist historian of our day, Dr John Foster, who in his book *The World Church*, repeats twice on one page the slogan: 'Christianity is "the Faith once for all delivered to the saints". Take it.—Keep it.—That is all.'<sup>4</sup> But is that all? Can we just 'hand out' the Gospel in this way, as if it consisted of a fixed form of words, of which no elucidation is needed, and no criticism welcomed?

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by G. C. Coulton, in *Fourscore Years* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Journal of Theological Studies* (July 1936), p. 329

<sup>4</sup> London, 1945, p. 8.

Even Dr Kraemer, who on occasion can show himself to be a master of clear and cogent argument, sometimes indulges in a 'flight from reason', denying the possibility of reaching an impartial conclusion:

The argument of value does not coincide in any way whatever with that of truth. . . . It is wholly dependent on one's fundamental assumptions whether one considers non-Christian achievements of higher value than the Christian. . . . To demand a rational argument for Faith is to make Reason, that is, Man, the standard of reference for faith.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that this rejection of the validity of human reasoning, and the denial of the possibility of reaching impartial judgments, provokes strong criticism on the part of those who have been trained in the methods of scientific thinking and the careful and dispassionate weighing of evidence. For instance, in 1949, Dr A. Comfort, of the London Hospital Medical College, wrote an article in the *Christian News-Letter*, on the present relations between Religion and Science. In this, he said: 'While Science has [of late] become less dogmatic, Religion has come to rely increasingly on mere assertion, and rarely takes the trouble to argue.'<sup>2</sup> He contrasts this 'modern Christian' attitude unfavourably with the careful use of argument by (say) St Thomas Aquinas, or the early Christian apologists. His challenge is one to which Christians will do well to take heed.

It is, of course, quite true that in every sphere of life, complete 'objectivity' (like complete infallibility) is beyond the reach of the human mind. Up to a point, Karl Barth is right when he says: 'There is no such thing as exegesis without presuppositions. . . . "Freedom from presuppositions" means that another presupposition is being made.'<sup>3</sup> This is the case not only in religion, but in science, art and morals. But do we in these cases abandon all effort to approach towards impartiality and truth?

In the case of Science, it is an essential principle that all judgments are provisional, and subject to revision in the light of fresh know-

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Message*, pp. 106 f. But if human reason is so valueless as a guide to truth, why should we put confidence in Dr Kraemer's reasoning, cogent though it may appear to be?

<sup>2</sup> No. 339 (19 Jan. 1949).

<sup>3</sup> *Credo*, p. 177.

ledge.<sup>1</sup> But the scientist does not therefore take refuge either in pure scepticism, or in irresponsible dogmatism. He builds upon the knowledge that has so far been gained, and goes forward from this to explore further, in faith that Truth is real, and can be increasingly understood by the mind of mankind as a whole. He believes that the general consensus of educated men, though not infallible, acts as a corrective to individual idiosyncrasies and one-sided opinions, and in the long run acts as a guide towards a fuller understanding of the Truth. A similar view was held by the 'Cambridge Platonists' of the seventeenth century, who used to maintain that 'the judgment of the well-instructed and virtuous man is to be trusted, in religion, morals and politics'.<sup>2</sup> By this, they certainly did not ascribe infallibility to any human judgment; but they held that when sincere and thoughtful men continue from one generation to another, and in all parts of the human race, to maintain the truth of certain opinions, there is a strong probability that in this corporate and continuous judgment, there is what the Cambridge Platonists called 'a divine sagacity',<sup>3</sup> in other words, the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

A balanced discussion of this problem, as it confronts us today, will be found in a booklet, *Objectivity and Impartiality*, by Prof. H. A. Hodges of the University of Reading.<sup>4</sup> In this, he first sets forth trenchantly the modern challenge to impartiality. He recognizes that this is partly justifiable, and that it has been useful in dispelling the facile assumption that complete objectivity is possible for any of us. But he deprecates the tendency to go on from this to encourage what he calls 'a panic return to dogmatism';<sup>5</sup> and he summarizes his own conclusions as follows:

The ideal of objectivity and impartiality . . . is fundamentally right; . . . [but] it is not as easy as we have often supposed. It does not follow that we must lapse into nihilism or scepticism. We must simply be more in earnest with [our] modesty, self-criticism, and readiness to learn from one another.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'The constant progress of Science constitutes a series of ever closer approximations to the truth. . . . The man of Science rarely, if ever, entirely rejects the conclusions of his predecessors' (Bishop E. W. Barnes, *Scientific Theory and Religion* [Cambridge, 1933], p. 4). <sup>2</sup> J. A. Stewart in Hastings *E.R.E.*, vol. iii, p. 171 b. <sup>3</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.* p. 168 a.

<sup>4</sup> London (S.C.M.), 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.* p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 26 f.

The sphere of religion is one in which complete objectivity is peculiarly difficult; partly because a purely external observer, who has not entered into the spiritual experience of the religion that he is studying, cannot understand its deeper significance.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, religious truth is at present seen by different groups of men in different aspects. But to deny that truth is ultimately one, and capable of being seen as a unity by the human mind, is to commit ourselves to an ultimate scepticism, which is fatal to religious faith, and none the less fatal when it is veiled by affirmations of dogmatic certainty.

We have considered at some length this problem of impartiality, because it bears closely upon the subject of our study in these lectures. For if Dr Kraemer is right in saying that 'the argument of *value* does not coincide *in any way whatever* with that of *truth*',<sup>2</sup> then all our consideration of the relative values of Christianity and other religions is based on merely subjective imaginings, and the conclusions towards which we have been led are without foundation in the realm of truth.

We turn now to another question, also relevant for the theme of our study.

#### THE VALIDITY OF THE APPEAL TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In some quarters today there is a tendency to reject altogether the appeal to religious experience, as entirely irrelevant to the claims of Christianity. In the Report of the Poona Theological Conference in India, in 1942, an English missionary said: 'Experience has no place at all in Christian Theology, as a basis for faith and doctrine. Christian faith flies in the face of experience and defies it.'<sup>3</sup>

But is this in harmony with the New Testament? We have already noted that the controversy that arose in the primitive Church, over the question of circumcision, was finally settled, not by an appeal to the authority of the past—which was unquestionably on the side of the conservative Jewish-Christians—but by

<sup>1</sup> 'One can only know a religion from within' (C. G. Montefiore, *The Religious Teaching of Jesus* [London, 1910], p. 3). <sup>2</sup> See above, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> H. V. Martin, in the *Bulletin* of the Poona Theological Conference (December 1942), p. 20.

an appeal to new, but visible and uncontrovertible facts of religious experience: 'If God has really given to these [uncircumcised heathen] the same gift of the Holy Spirit that he gave to us [circumcised Jews]—who are we, to resist God?'<sup>1</sup> St Paul, too, often appeals to his own experience of 'Christ within him',<sup>2</sup> and refers to the Christian experience of his readers, as something so real that none of them could doubt it: 'Such *were* some of you; but ye have been washed, . . . ye have been sanctified.'<sup>3</sup>

To follow this principle is not to accept uncritically the claim of every individual who professes to have had a 'religious experience'. But it does lead us to recognize the possibility that the living God may speak and act through channels unsanctioned by the authority of the past, and even through some whom we reckon to be 'outside the Church'. As Christians, then, we need not assume that God has spoken only to Christians; but we shall endeavour to test the religious experience of others by the standards of Christ, and see whether it is (as far as we can judge) due to the impulse of his Spirit. In so doing, we believe we are following a method approved by him.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.<sup>4</sup>

By their fruits ye shall know them.<sup>5</sup>

Our purpose in this lecture has been to see on what main principles the Christian attitude to other religions should be based and to distinguish between those principles which may fairly claim to be essentially Christian because they have been held *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus* in the Church, and other principles which have been held only at certain times, or by certain sections of Christians. In our concluding lecture, we shall consider the practical working out of these principles in the Church's policy, and especially in the field of Foreign Missions.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xi. 17; cf. x. 47, xv. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 16, etc.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. vi. 11; cf. I Cor. xv. 17 ff.; I Pet. iv. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. vii. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. vii. 16, 20; cf. Gal. v. 16-23.



LECTURE VI

THE REFORM OF MISSIONARY POLICY  
AND PRACTICE



## LECTURE VI

# THE REFORM OF MISSIONARY POLICY AND PRACTICE

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In this last lecture we shall consider, in the light of the principles which (if our conclusions so far are sound) are essentially Christian, whether there is need for certain changes in the present policy and practice of Christian Missions to non-Christians. If we are thereby led to criticize some of the methods, or even some of the aims, of present-day Missions, this is with the desire to increase, and not to diminish, their ultimate effectiveness. For we are convinced that Christian Missions, in some form or other, ought to continue, and that their past achievements have a permanent value that ought to be preserved; and this, in spite of the many criticisms, valid and invalid, to which they have been subjected.

### THE CONSTRUCTIVE PURPOSE OF REFORMS

#### *The grounds on which Missions have been criticized*

Criticism of Christian Missions is quite logical and legitimate for non-Christians, if it is based on an honest belief that Christianity is not the highest known type of religion, or, at least, not qualified to be the religion of all mankind. That belief, in itself, presents a challenge to Christian apologists; but since we are considering the *Christian* attitude to other religions, it does not immediately concern us here.

Where, however, non-Christian criticisms of Christian Missions are directed against specific features of missionary methods, and are based on principles which we too accept, these do call for our careful consideration. Even among professing Christians, there have been (and still are) many who refuse to admit any obligation to proclaim the Gospel to those of other faiths. Let us see on what grounds they base this refusal.

(i) *Sub-Christian motives.* Not infrequently, opposition to Missions can be traced to motives that are patently un-Christian, or at least sub-Christian. For instance, the frenzied opposition to Missions in India by the East India Company in the early nineteenth century was due almost entirely to the fear that missionary activities would lead to political upheavals, which in turn would bring financial loss to the Company. That was why, when a proposal to permit missionaries to enter their territory was brought before their Court of Proprietors in 1793, the Directors, one after the other, rose in vehement protest. The Court was warned that 'to suffer clergymen, under the name of missionaries, to overrun India, would prove utterly destructive of the Company's interests'; and that 'if ten, fifty, or a hundred thousand natives were converted, the moment that event took place in India, there would be an end of British supremacy!' Other speakers professed themselves moved to pious indignation at the idea of interfering with 'the sublime Hindoo religion', which produced 'men of the purest morality and strictest virtue'; and they affirmed that none but 'the dregs' among the natives would ever embrace Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

No less violent were the attacks upon Missions by Canon Sydney Smith, in his articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1809. He, however, had a genuine loathing for cant and hypocrisy, and did not pretend to any love for the 'poor dear Hindu'. His concern was simply for the welfare and safety of his own countrymen: 'If the missionaries are not watched, the throat of every European in India will be cut!'<sup>2</sup> He was also afraid that the prestige of the Ruling Race would suffer, when the people of India observed the contrast between the practice of professing Christians and the precepts of their Holy Book:

If the Bible is diffused in Hindustan, what must be the astonishment of the natives, to find that we are forbidden to rob, murder, and steal; —we, who in fifty years have extended our Empire over the whole [Indian] peninsula, and exemplified in our public conduct every crime of which human nature is capable. What matchless impudence, to follow up such *practice* with such *precepts!*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The speeches of the Directors' Meeting, 23 May 1793, are given in J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward* (London, 1859), pp. 42-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Review* (April 1809), p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

There is a robust honesty in this outburst which enlists our sympathy; but the Canon's violence of invective against missionaries becomes at times extravagant.

They are nasty and numerous vermin! . . . They complain of our 'intolerance'?—A weasel might as well complain of 'intolerance' when he is throttled for sucking an egg!<sup>1</sup>

A similar outlook, though not as a rule so intemperately expressed, can be discerned in the 'anti-missionary' utterances of many eminent Christians of the Victorian era. Most of them had a deep-rooted aversion to the idea of admitting inferior 'coloured' races into the same religious fold as the White Man. H. A. L. Fisher quotes Prime Minister Canning as saying: 'Christianity is no more fitted for the negro than for the animal with whom he shares his toil.'<sup>2</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, this aversion continued, side by side with the fear that missionary activity would lead to political unrest among subject peoples, involving serious imperial and international complications, and injuring the commerce and prosperity of England. Lord Salisbury—a statesman who claimed to be 'a staunch Churchman', remarked grimly: 'Missions are not popular at the Foreign Office',<sup>3</sup> and the opinion of the British public was expressed by *The Times*, in a leading article in 1869: 'Parliament is *not fond* of missionaries, nor is the Press, nor is general society. Missionaries are people who are always provoking the men of the world.'<sup>4</sup> But then, 'men of the world' are always being 'provoked' by those who take Jesus Christ seriously.

(ii) *The prior urgency of 'Home Missions'.* Even among men of the highest Christian character and ideals, an attitude of indifference, verging towards hostility, to Missions has not been unknown. This was the case with S. T. Coleridge, Dr Arnold of Rugby, and even Archbishop Benson.<sup>5</sup> It was partly due to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Europe* (1935 ed.), vol. II, p. 1029.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by J. H. Maclean, *I.R.M.* July 1918, p. 395.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by J. McLeod Campbell, *Christian History in the Making* (London, 1946), p. 240.

<sup>5</sup> Coleridge, after lamenting 'the languid state of his feelings' about the heathen, affirmed his 'strong conviction that the conversion of a single province of Christendom to true and practical Christianity would do more towards the conversion of heathenism than an army of missionaries' (*Notes on English Divines* (London 1853), vol. II, p. 67).

In 1840, Dr Arnold asked: 'Is not the maze of evil here [in England] greater a thousand times than all the idolatry in India?'

In 1878, Archbishop Benson deprecated missionaries 'going off to the frontier', while

enterprise as a whole, or to deny its obligation upon all Christian people.

In short, a survey of the criticisms passed upon Missions as a whole has failed to reveal any criticism which has succeeded in showing that Christian Missions are, on principle, contrary to 'the mind of Christ'.

*Missions must continue because love must be shared*

As against all the criticisms of Missions that have been put forward, it is surely clear that if in essence Christianity is a revelation and a message of Love, both Divine and human, then Love, because of its own essential nature cannot but seek to spread itself and share itself with others. The writers of *Re-Thinking Missions* have put this clearly:

The Mission<sup>1</sup> in some form is a matter, not of choice, but of obligation. If there is any truth or value in religion, it is for all men. To ask whether missions in essence should any longer go on, is like asking whether goodwill should continue, or cease to express itself.<sup>2</sup>

*The past achievements of Missions are worthy of preservation*

The achievements of Christian Missions, which began on such a humble scale and with such slender resources, have indeed been wonderful. To this, the world-wide Church of today is itself the greatest of all monuments; for in every land, the Church was founded at the first by a 'missionary' proclamation of the gospel to non-Christians. As the result of ancient and modern missionary work, it has been reckoned that out of a total world population of some 1700 millions, nearly 600 millions are now professing Christians.<sup>3</sup> To ignore such an achievement after the manner affected by some modern writers of 'world history',<sup>4</sup> is merely a sign of prejudice, and a refusal to recognize unwelcome facts.

<sup>1</sup> American writers commonly speak of 'the Mission', where English writers would say 'Missions'.  
<sup>2</sup> P. 235.

<sup>3</sup> See A. C. Bouquet's *Comparative Religion* (Pelican Books, 1942), p. 200. It is difficult to know how far to reckon as 'Christian' such countries as Russia or France.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. H. G. Wells's *Short History of Mankind* (London, 1919), or Van Loon's *The Home of Mankind* (1943). Even the *Cambridge Modern History* (1910 ed.) ignores the modern missionary movement in both text and index, apart from one rather depreciatory reference to the political activities of Roman Catholic Missions in China (vol. xii. pp. 514 f.).

A perusal of Dr Latourette's seven carefully documented volumes, to which we have had frequent occasion to refer,<sup>1</sup> provides abundant evidence of these achievements in every part of the globe. Savage peoples have been tamed; backward tribes have been led forward into a fuller and happier life,<sup>2</sup> and attempts to oppress and exploit them by nominally Christian conquerors or traders have been constantly resisted, and in some cases checked.<sup>3</sup> In saying this, we are not forgetting the weaknesses of Missions, to which in fact we shall shortly be devoting considerable attention. Nor are we denying that the 'appeal to achievement' is not one which can be uniformly made on behalf of Christendom as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

But this at least is beyond question; that the history of Foreign Missions provides us with the finest chapters in the whole record of the Church;—chapters rich in heroism, self-sacrifice, and love, expressed in effective action. When the Church is charged (sometimes not without reason) with bigotry, obscurantism and cruelty, this other side of the picture needs also to be borne in mind. A Gifford Lecturer, himself an Anglican prelate more noted for caustic criticism than for excessive sentimentality, after denouncing the exploitation of the coloured peoples by European Christians ('no blacker chapters can be found in the record of humanity than those which tell the story of greed, cruelty and lust which the White Race has contributed to the experience of mankind'), goes on to say:

In this woeful picture, there is one redeeming feature:—the heroism of the apostles of Christianity. . . . Missionaries have made mistakes. Their minds have been clouded by foolish misunderstandings; . . . but in spite of all defects, these men and women were carried forward by the purest altruism. . . . Take away Foreign Missions from the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Sir Harry Johnston, *Backward Peoples* (Oxford, 1920), pp. 56 f.

<sup>3</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. iv, pp. 301, 325, &c.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 99 f. The Jerusalem Missionary Conference of 1928 admitted that 'the record of Christendom is unconvincing' (*Report*, p. 487). Dr J. K. Mozley, in his *Achievements of Christianity* (London, 1917), p. 28, comes to the conclusion that 'Christianity's great achievement is itself'—a conclusion which will hardly convince the outsider who is doubtful of the value of present-day Christianity!

## THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

recent history of Britain, and you would have robbed that history of its purest glory.<sup>1</sup>

No less cordial was the appreciation of Missions by President McKinley of the United States, at the Oecumenical Conference in New York in 1900:

The story of Christian Missions [he said] is one of thrilling interest and marvellous results. The services and sacrifices of missionaries for their fellow-men constitute one of the most glorious pages of the world's history. . . . They have promoted concord and unity, have brought nations and races closer together, and have made men better.<sup>2</sup>

## THE WEAKNESSES OF MISSIONS TODAY

It is therefore with full and genuine appreciation of the past achievements and noble spirit of Christian Missions as a whole, that we turn now to the less congenial task of considering their weak points. That there should be in the missionary enterprise some elements of weakness and imperfection is quite inevitable. For in Missions there is a human factor, as well as a Divine; and in everything human there is something of imperfection, and even of sin. In the case of Missions, this element stands out in especially dark relief, because of its close contact with high ideals and heroic achievements. To ignore or underestimate these would be no true service to the missionary cause; for reform in certain matters would greatly assist in the achievement of the missionary aim.

It is only too clear that the present missionary situation gives little ground for complacency. While there are signs in some quarters of a rising tide of enthusiasm for Missions, this is touching only a small minority of those who call themselves Christians; and the number of conversions to Christianity, though large in itself, is not nearly keeping pace with the total growth of the population of the world.<sup>3</sup> This in itself suggests that the present methods of missionary work are not beyond criticism, and that changes are not only permissible, but vitally necessary.

<sup>1</sup> H. Hensley Henson, *Christian Morality* (Gifford Lectures, 1935-6), pp. 243-5.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in the *Encyclopaedia of Missions* (New York, 1902), p. 550.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 28.

*The relatively low level of average Christianity*

In human life, practice and achievement always fall below the level of precepts and ideals. This is true of the Church as a whole, and not the least of the Church on the Mission-field; and there it is peculiarly serious, because of its effect upon non-Christians.

It will be generally agreed that in almost every land and every age, the Church has produced some remarkable and distinctive examples of Christian (in the sense of really *Christ-like*) character. Such lives provide perhaps the most valuable of all testimonies in support of the Christian claim for supremacy. It is also beyond question that the first effects of conversion from other religions to Christianity are generally manifest in an unmistakable raising of moral standards, not only in the lives of individual converts, but also in the corporate life of the community that has professed the Christian Faith.<sup>1</sup>

But side by side with this, it must be recognized that among Christian communities of the second and third generations (as well as in those with longer Christian antecedents behind them), the standards today often appear to be very little, if at all, above the level of those of adjacent non-Christian communities of similar social status. In India, for example, there are all too many 'Christian' villages and mission-compounds in which the standard of morals, and the whole atmosphere of the social life, is a scandal to the outsider, and a despair to the pastor and missionary.<sup>2</sup> With regard to conditions in Africa, missionaries in Central Africa reported in 1915 that the coming of Christianity to backward tribes, undermining (as it did) the authority of old tribal rules and customs, had led at first to an actual *increase* of immorality and drunkenness among the converts.<sup>3</sup>

It would, of course, be wrong to generalize on the basis of a few instances, or to ignore the brighter side of the picture. But

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Bishop J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass-Movements in India* (Lucknow, 1933), chs. III-IX.

<sup>2</sup> Some ten years ago, the Commissioner of a large District in Northern India (himself a sincere friend of Missions) pointed out to me that in the statistics of crime for his District, a 'Christian' village had a *higher* 'crime-record' (in proportion to its size) than any of the surrounding non-Christian villages.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop C. H. Robinson (of the S.P.G.), *A History of Christian Missions* (Edinburgh, 1915), pp. 353 ff.

this, I think, can safely be said: that at present, the average standard of moral and spiritual achievement among professing Christians, both at home and abroad, is not sufficiently outstanding to provide the non-Christian with a convincing confirmation of the claim of the Christian religion to be able to produce unique results in uplifting the lives of its adherents.

The Tambaram Conference Report on *Evangelism* records that Dr Ambedkar, a recognized leader of the 'Depressed Classes' in India, said to a group of Christians: 'What about the Christian communities in India? I see no substantial difference in their standards of living and those of their non-Christian neighbours.'<sup>1</sup> This would certainly not be true in all cases; but it is true sufficiently often to confront the Christian missionary movement with the most searching challenge that it has to meet today.<sup>2</sup>

There are some who would answer this challenge by saying that, after all, it is not the main purpose of the Christian religion to make men morally better, but to implant in them supernatural grace through the sacraments. This was an argument used with vigour by Fr. George Tyrrell. 'A life of average morality, with frequent sacraments, is more pleasing to God than a life of heroic morality, without sacraments. It is only the sacraments that make us sons of God.'<sup>3</sup> To this however, the non-Christian may well reply: 'What *evidence* have you to show us that such grace *has*, in fact, been imparted?' To many Christians, moreover, this view seems quite irreconcilable with the message of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.

It is contended by many today that the most urgent task before

<sup>1</sup> Tambaram Reports, vol. III, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> I may perhaps be permitted to cite two personal recollections:

(a) Some time after my first arrival in India in 1919, I saw in the streets of Calcutta a man obviously 'drunk and disorderly'. I remarked to a Hindu friend that this appeared to be a very rare sight in India, and that it was the first time that I had seen it. His reply was: 'O, but that man is no doubt a Christian; he is trying to imitate the Sahibs!' I found out before long that the gibe was only too well justified; there was more drunkenness among Indian Christians in Calcutta than among Hindus and Muslims.

(b) Some years ago, Dr S. Radhakrishnan said to me: 'You Christians seem to us Hindus to be rather *ordinary* people, making very *extraordinary* claims!' I replied that we make these claims, not for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ. The retort came back quickly: 'If your Christ has not succeeded in making *you* into better men and women, have we any reason to suppose that he would do more for *us*, if we became Christians?'

<sup>3</sup> Christianity at the Cross Roads (London, 1909), p. 72.

the Church is to recover our sense of the importance of Christian dogma.<sup>1</sup> Now in so far as this leads to clearer thinking and a firmer grasp on fundamental Christian principles, it is all to the good. But unless this increased emphasis on dogma is balanced by increased emphasis on—and clear and unmistakable *evidence* of—the distinctive moral supremacy of Christian life and character, it will not carry conviction with non-Christians. On the contrary, it will only increase the suspicion with which they view our Christian claims.

The need is, not that Christians should lower these claims, but that we should recognize, more clearly than we have done in the past, that such claims must be substantiated, both in the practical life of today, and by historical evidence of past achievements. It is not enough simply to reaffirm that Christ is 'the One and Only Saviour', or that the Incarnation is 'the one great pivotal-point in human history', unless we can also show, by evidence such as will carry conviction to the minds of impartial historians, that these affirmations are supported by the facts of life. Some Christian scholars are prepared to maintain the thesis that History *after* Christ is 'qualitatively different' from History *before* Christ.<sup>2</sup> But that is just what appears doubtful, to many students of history. Dr Nicol Cross, for instance, asks:

*Can we say that history A.D. offers any spectacular or cataclysmic contrast with history B.C.? Does the state of the world since [the Incarnation] indicate the operation of a force wholly dissimilar, *sui generis*, and supernatural, introduced into human nature in the first century of our era?*<sup>3</sup>

Such questions are not to be lightly dismissed, nor resented as impertinent. For myself, I believe that an answer to them which will satisfy sincere non-Christians is 'Priority Number One' in the missionary task today; and that it must be linked with an unmistakable uplift of the moral and spiritual level of life among

<sup>1</sup> This is the demand of Neo-Orthodoxy, as voiced by Dr D. R. Davies (*On to Orthodoxy*, London, 1939), and by Dorothy L. Sayers (*Dogma Matters!* and *Creed or Chaos?* London, 1947), and it has been echoed by some of the leaders of the Younger Churches; e.g. by the Theological Conference at Poona (India) in 1942, Finding No. 1: 'Dogma, the Word of God, is absolute and unchanging.'

<sup>2</sup> e.g. C. H. Dodd, in *The Apostolic Preaching* (London, 1936), p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> The *Hibbert Journal* (October 1945), p. 90.

professing Christians. Only when the Christian life is seen (more clearly than it is at present) to be something distinctive and worthy of honour, will they desire to appropriate it for themselves.

If it is undeniable that the present standard of life and morals among professing Christians in non-Christian lands fails to command adequate respect, we are led to ask whether this may not be due, in some measure, to defects in the missionary methods used by the Church in the past and the present. So we turn now to consider some of these.

*The use of sub-Christian methods to achieve Christian ends*

The question 'Does the end justify the means?' is continually confronting Christians in every sphere of life. Some glibly answer 'Of course not!' But in practice (as Reinhold Niebuhr has repeatedly reminded us)<sup>1</sup> it is almost, if not quite, impossible to pursue a line of action that is ideally perfect, while we are living in a human society that is interpenetrated at every point with sin.

In the mission-field, this problem presents itself in an exceptionally acute form. Every true missionary desires intensely to achieve his aim; but he soon realizes that if he confronts simple or savage folks only with idealistic appeals to sacrifice and service, it is unlikely that he will meet with any response at all. His only chance of making a start in his work seems to be to begin with appeals to motives that are effective—the hope of rewards, or the fear of punishments; trusting that later on, having won his first converts by these means, he will be able to lead them on to higher ideals.

In the past, methods of intimidation and bribery have often been used—and effectively used—in order to win converts to the Church. We have noted how Charlemagne put before those whom he conquered the choice: 'Baptism or the sword!' and that it was largely by such methods that Europe was 'converted to Christianity'.<sup>2</sup>

Among the pioneers of Roman Catholic Missions, we find,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. in his Gifford Lectures, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (London, 1939), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 119; also Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. II, *passim*; or Oskar Pfister, *Christianity and Fear* (Eng. trans., London, 1948).

side by side with magnificent heroism and a tender compassion for lost souls, a readiness to use force, and to appeal to the cupidity of secular rulers, which shocks our moral sense. Even St Francis Xavier asked the Pope to send the Inquisition to India, and urged the king of Portugal to order his colonial governors to *compel* their conquered peoples to become Christians.<sup>1</sup> A similar mixture of high and low motives is found in a sermon preached by a great enthusiast for Missions, Padre Antonio Vieira, before King John III of Portugal, at Lisbon, in A.D. 1665. First, he makes an eloquent appeal to the pure Christian motive of pity for the countless souls in Africa, Asia, and America, who, if they die in heathenism, 'are not merely uncertain of Heaven, but certain of Hell';<sup>2</sup> and then he proceeds: 'God says: O Kingdom of Portugal! I promise thee the restoration of all the kingdoms which once paid thee tribute, and the conquest of many other still wealthier ones, if thou wilt make them [the heathen] fall down and worship Me!'

Among Protestants, the Dutch in Ceylon in the seventeenth century used both bribery and oppression to win 'converts' to Christianity, and obtained by these methods about half a million baptisms—followed, after the end of Dutch rule, by an almost equal number of 'apostasies'.<sup>3</sup>

Such gross methods of proselytism are, fortunately, almost unknown today. But subtler motives of a similar kind are still operative, and are sometimes tolerated or encouraged by missionaries.<sup>4</sup> An outcaste community in India may see that by embracing Christianity it can win for itself an otherwise unattainable freedom from Brahmin oppression, and a social status undreamt of before. A schoolboy or student in a missionary institution may be led to attend a Christian Bible-class merely because he fears disciplinary action—or at least the displeasure of his teachers—if he absents himself. The young non-Christian on the look-out for a career may be tempted to offer himself for

<sup>1</sup> See E. A. Stewart, *St Francis Xavier* (London, 1917), pp. 237, 256 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nao so teem a Ceo duovidoso, mas o Inferno e a condemnaçao certa' (*Sermoes do Padre Antonio Vieira* [Oporto, 1907 ed.], vol. II, p. 377).

<sup>3</sup> See Warneck, *op. cit.* pp. 39-46.

<sup>4</sup> See D. J. Fleming, *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths* (New York, 1929), Part II, 'Inducements offered'.

baptism, in the hope that he will thereby stand a better chance of an appointment in a Christian school or college. Even in educational, industrial and medical missions, which at their best show forth the spirit of Christian love in its purest forms, there is sometimes apparent a tendency to use the benefits which they offer, not as channels for disinterested service, but as baits wherewith to catch the unwary in the ecclesiastical net.

'Mixed motives' of this kind are not peculiar to Foreign Missions; and missionaries to-day are for the most part alive to the dangers inherent in them. Moreover, in many lands, the social and political influence of the Church is diminishing rapidly, and consequently its power to impose penalties or offer rewards is becoming correspondingly less. Missionary leaders are now eagerly proclaiming their adherence to the principle of complete personal liberty in religion.<sup>1</sup> But non-Christians cannot at once forget that when the authorities of the Church on the mission-field had the power to use methods in which there was an element of force, or at least 'pressure', they did so without compunction; and this is one of the chief causes for the extreme bitterness with which many non-Christians of high ideals regard the Christian missionary movement today.<sup>2</sup> If Christian Missions are to live and grow in the New Age that lies before us, they will need to be very careful in testing by the highest moral standards the methods which they adopt.

#### *One-sided partisanship*

It is evident that the 'call of Missions' generally makes its appeal in the first place to motives of heroism and self-sacrifice, rather than to calm and reasoned reflection. Consequently, the first response to that call tends to come from persons who are by nature emotional and enthusiastic, rather than critical and dispassionate. Now the appeal to emotion has a rightful place in the Christian religion, with its key-note of love. But there is a danger that just because those who respond are for the most part enthusiastic, they will envisage the missionary cause somewhat ideally,

<sup>1</sup> See the Resolutions of the Jerusalem and Tambaram Missionary Conferences, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> See M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions* (Ahmedabad, 1941), pp. 211 ff., etc.

and depict it to others in terms that are highly coloured and a little one-sided. This has certainly been a characteristic feature, in the past, of missionary literature, and of missionary speakers at public meetings. The worst features of heathenism have constantly been placed side by side with the finest features of Christianity, for the purpose of dramatic contrast.<sup>1</sup> Often, too, missionaries seem to show 'a professional interest in the depreciation of other religions'.<sup>2</sup> If they meet with good qualities in individual non-Christians, they either try to minimize these virtues, or assume, on the basis of *a priori* dogma, that they cannot really be the product of a heathen religious system, but must be due to 'the mysterious working of God's Spirit'.<sup>3</sup> When confronted with the remarkable resemblances between Christianity and other religions, and the close parallelism between the lines along which all these have developed their doctrines and worship, which the modern science of Comparative Religion has brought to light, they seem generally anxious to depreciate these as 'merely superficial', or as 'mere coincidences', rather than to welcome them generously (as Archbishop Söderblom has done)<sup>4</sup> as signs of the operation of the One Spirit of God 'at sundry times and in divers manners', binding them all together in an 'organic unity', which Christian men should view, not with misgivings, but with thankfulness.

In recent years, there has certainly been an effort on the part of many missionary leaders to encourage a less prejudiced attitude to other religions; and the results of this are to be seen in the greatly improved missionary literature of today. But wherever the 'war-attitude' towards non-Christian religions still remains, it is almost inevitable that missionary propaganda should exhibit something of the one-sidedness and disregard for inconvenient truths which have come to be associated with the very word 'propaganda', in both war and politics. As a short-term policy, propaganda of this type is undoubtedly effective; but in the long

<sup>1</sup> Dr J. N. Farquhar (himself a keen missionary), admits that the older missionary literature was often 'harsh', 'denunciatory' and sometimes 'seriously inaccurate' (*The Crown of Hinduism* [Oxford, 1913], p. 37). <sup>2</sup> *Re-Thinking Missions*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> So Dr Kraemer, in *Continuity*, p. 4. Dr H. F. Roll, in *I.R.M.* (Jan. 1940), remarks that in this matter, Dr Kraemer's judgment 'seems to be' determined less by facts, than by his theological point of view' (p. 136). <sup>4</sup> *Gifford Lectures*, chap. III.

run it tends to create in the public mind a sceptical attitude towards all its claims.

In the future, it is likely to be more and more difficult for missionaries to avoid a partisan attitude towards other religions, because of the increasing tendency on the part of the latter to restrict the free preaching of the Gospel, and, in particular, the making of 'converts' from one religion to another. That tendency is evident on many sides. In Egypt, and in parts of Pakistan, there is a revival of orthodox Islam, which has always (at least in theory) regarded apostasy from Islam as a crime deserving of the death-penalty; and the modern secular Islam of Turkey and Iraq is demanding a homogeneous Muslim nation, based on Islamic culture—a policy which is no less hostile to Christian missionary activity.<sup>1</sup> Modern 'Liberal' Hinduism, too, while professing tolerance for all religions, strongly deprecates 'proselytism' by Christians.<sup>2</sup> Buddhism in Ceylon has secured legislation which forbids the teaching of Christianity to non-Christian children, even if their parents desire it.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in many lands, Communism is advancing relentlessly, and wherever it becomes dominant, it seeks to suppress every form of Christianity which is not prepared to submit to its totalitarian authority.

All this is creating an atmosphere in which it is hard for Christian missionaries to maintain a calm and unprejudiced outlook; and their most natural reaction is to meet this hostility by methods of counter-attack and propaganda. Yet never is the duty of fair-mindedness and courtesy more essential than under conditions such as these.

A further charge that has often been brought against missionaries is that they are narrow-minded and reactionary in their theology. Now it is almost inevitable that missionaries in remote stations, who are isolated from libraries and centres of learning, should be

<sup>1</sup> See S. A. Morrison, *Religious Liberty in the Near East* (World Dominion Press, 1948), pp. 6, 11, 14.

<sup>2</sup> See the article 'Christians in the New India', by Mark Sunder Rao (a convert from Hinduism) in the *C. of E. Newspaper*, 4 Nov. 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Ceylon Ordnance No. 26 of 17 June 1947, Section 29 (2): 'The Principal of any Government or Assisted School shall not require or permit a pupil of the school to attend, in the school or its premises, any instruction in, or any worship or observance connected with, a religion which is not the religion of the parent of the pupil.'

somewhat 'behind the times' in their knowledge and thinking. But for myself, after fairly extensive personal contacts with missionaries in their own fields of work during more than a quarter of a century, I believe that this charge has but little foundation, and that 'foreign missionaries' are, on the whole, not less (and in many cases, somewhat more) open-minded and unconventional than their brethren in the ministry of the Churches 'at home'.

*The attitude of racial or cultural superiority*

Another charge often levelled against Christian missionaries is that their work is undertaken, not in a spirit of true Christian fellowship, but in an attitude of patronizing superiority towards peoples whom they regard as essentially inferior. This charge is constantly made by Oriental and African peoples who have been the objects of Christian missionary work; and it is a charge which calls for serious consideration.

In India, this complaint has been voiced for more than half a century past;<sup>1</sup> and it runs as an undercurrent through most recent writings and speeches by Indian Christians.<sup>2</sup> African Christians, who in the past have been for the most part relatively silent and docile, are now joining vociferously in the chorus of denunciation.<sup>3</sup>

It is undeniable that the inherent supremacy of the White Races has sometimes been asserted in the name of religion. It was a Christian minister in America who revived the Ku Klux Klan in 1915, with its slogan: 'Protestant Christianity and White Supremacy!'<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in April 1941, the Secretary of the National Missionary Society of Australia wrote an article in the *International Review of Missions* in defence of the 'White Australia' policy in that continent.<sup>5</sup> Among many Continental theologians, too, an underlying attitude of contempt for all non-European peoples appears from time to time, particularly in incidental references to

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Mr Satthianadhan, in 1890; see above, p. 173, n. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Notably in *Re-Thinking Christianity in India*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> See *I.R.M.* for 1945-8.

<sup>4</sup> The founder of the new order of the Klan in 1915 was the Rev. W. J. Simmons (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1946 ed.], vol. xiii, art. 'Ku Klux Klan').

<sup>5</sup> 'The White Australia Policy', by J. W. Dovey (*I.R.M.* [April 1941], pp. 180-90).

them.<sup>1</sup> Nor has this been always absent in the case of our own countrymen,<sup>2</sup> though the rapid decline of British Imperialism in the last few years has greatly diminished it.

Today, an explicit avowal of racial superiority is rare, though not unknown. But there are situations in which the missionary is almost forced to appear to support this. For instance, in India during the closing years of British rule, the criticism of everything British was so fierce, and often so unfair, that a British missionary often felt himself bound to attempt to rebut these charges; and thereby he incurred the charge of being at heart an 'Imperialist'. Moreover, in the majority of the 'younger Churches', the missionary of necessity holds a position of pre-eminence—socially, intellectually and financially—which he cannot avoid.

But it is, I think, evident that the foreign missionary has often tried to maintain this position after the Church has attained to a large measure of corporate self-consciousness; and this has become a source of constant bitterness, weakening the life and witness of the Church in all its activities. The missionary continues to think and speak of '*our* native Christians' in a tone of proprietorship, even after some of these have become intellectually and culturally his own equals, and are resentful of anything savouring of patronage. Generally, he himself is quite unconscious of the feelings of his flock in this matter; for they never speak of it to him, partly because of their instinctive respect for his status, and partly from self-interest, because he is their paymaster. Many a missionary who would gladly give his life for his flock, and is scrupulous in avoiding all rudeness towards them, can yet never bring himself to deal with them on a basis of natural human friendship, or forget that he carries the White Man's Burden—and the White Man's prestige. He may cover his feelings by a display of

<sup>1</sup> Barth, for instance tells us that he 'shudders' at the thought of 'the Negro on the Rhine' (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 144); and in his Gifford Lectures, says: 'Anti-Semitism is right; . . . Israel is an evil people' (p. 60).

<sup>2</sup> In 1901 Bishop Churton of Nassau spoke of the English missionary as 'part of British civilization' (*Foreign Missions*, p. 3); and in 1907, a volume *Church and Empire* (edited by Canon Ellison and Bishop Walpole, with an Introduction by Archbishop Randall Davidson) advocated as the central missionary motive for English people 'the sense of Imperial duty towards those backward races which are wards of the British Crown' (pp. xviii, 33).

exuberant affection, or by studied courtesy; but his flock quickly sense his real feelings behind all this. The late Bishop Azariah of Dornakal was keenly sensitive on this point. At the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, he flung out to his Western fellow-Christians a challenge, which (as Dr Gairdner, in his Report, admits) caused great offence at the time among missionaries:—‘You have given your goods to feed the poor; you have given your bodies to be burned; We also ask for *love*! Give us *friends*!’<sup>1</sup> Perhaps only those of us who have been missionaries can fully realize how subtle and pervading is this temptation to adopt an attitude of superiority towards those of other races; and we know that we ourselves have been guilty of it, in some form or other.

But Christians in the West who are vocal in criticism of ‘the wrong attitude of missionaries towards the natives’ often view the peoples of far-off lands through a halo of romance. They would not always be equally ready to appreciate them as near neighbours. For the American, it is much easier to imagine that he ‘loves’ the Chinese or the Indian in distant Asia, than the Negro in his own street. To the Englishman, the Negro may appear much more lovable than the English family that occupies the flat adjacent to his own.

All the same, the Christians of Africa and the East are quite right when they say that this attitude of superiority is alien from the spirit of Jesus Christ, who dealt with the men and women he met without a trace of condescension, patronage, or even apparent consciousness of racial or social barriers. In the days ahead, it will be more vital than ever for the effective work of Missions that all race-consciousness of superiority or inferiority should be exorcised, and replaced by grace to see in every human being ‘the brother for whom Christ died’.

#### SOME OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS OF MISSIONARY WORK TODAY

Having now considered some of the matters in which measures of reform in the missionary policy and practice of the past are

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh 1910*, cd. by W. H. T. Gairdner, p. 111.

indubitably called for, we may now turn to some problems where the answer is less easy, and on which there is a difference of opinion among sincere supporters of the missionary cause.

*The necessity of 'conversion'?*

One of the most burning questions in missionary policy today is this: 'Is it always obligatory for every convert to Christianity to leave his old religious community, and join some organized branch of the Christian Church?' To that question, the majority of missionaries have always unhesitatingly answered: 'Yes, invariably!'<sup>1</sup>

A few, however, have been prepared to admit some exceptions to this general rule. In 1914, the Rev. Bernard Lucas of the London Missionary Society in India suggested that the missionary's primary duty is to 'evangelize', not to 'proselytize'; in other words, that after he has *proclaimed* the Gospel clearly and fully, he should leave it to his hearers to decide what steps they should take in response.<sup>2</sup> C. F. Andrews, too, in his early years in India, deprecated 'the desire to capture converts from Hinduism';<sup>3</sup> and he never seems to have used his intimate friendship with non-Christians, such as Tagore and Gandhi, as a means to persuade them to become professing Christians. At the Tambaran Conference of 1928, the Rev. H. H. Riggs, secretary of the Near East Mission Council, urged that the missionary to Muslims should aim 'to make Christ known to men who need Him; not primarily to win them away from Islam'.<sup>4</sup> The American authors of *Re-Thinking Missions* (1932) urged that 'the time has come to set the educational and other philanthropic aspects of mission

<sup>1</sup> For an able statement of this view, see A. G. Hogg, *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (London, 1943), ch. III: 'Come, join my Church!'

<sup>2</sup> *Our Task in India* (London, 1914), ch. I.

<sup>3</sup> M. Sykes and B. Chaturvedi, *Charles Freer Andrews* (London, 1949), p. 63. In his later years, however, Andrews stoutly opposed Gandhi's contention that no one should ever change his religion; and where he was satisfied that the motive for such change was sincere and free from base motives, he was prepared to approve of conversion and baptism (p. 309). In an article in *I.R.M.* (July 1939), he says that it is impossible for Christians to accept Gandhi's view that all religions are of equal value, and that 'conversion' is never to be encouraged; but at the same time, he thinks even this to be preferable to the intolerance of the traditional missionary outlook (p. 262).

<sup>4</sup> *Tambaran Report*, vol. III, p. 228.

work free from the responsibility to the work of conscious and direct evangelism'.<sup>1</sup>

But all such views have remained exceptional, and have not received general acceptance in missionary circles. A denunciation of 'proselytism'<sup>2</sup> is, however, common among Christian nationals of the 'younger Churches', many of whom maintain that a 'disciple of Christ' may, under present circumstances, be quite justified in remaining outside any organized Church.<sup>3</sup> In the matter of Christian policy towards the Jews, Dr James Parkes (himself an Anglican priest) has vigorously challenged the desirability of attempting to convert them to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> But those who admit even these few exceptions to the general obligation to join the Church, are but a small minority in the Church at large. The majority firmly maintain that 'joining the Church' is an essential element in Christian discipleship.

There are several practical considerations which support this view. First among these is the urgent desirability—not to say the necessity—of a Church of some kind. As an American speaker said at Amsterdam in 1948: (after admitting that a 'Doctrine of the Church' finds little place in the recorded teaching of Jesus). 'Christ cannot be operative in our world as a disembodied spirit. His spirit must act through some bodily expression, if its existence is to be manifest'.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, experience seems to show decisively that only those Missions which are careful in the building up of a Church are able to stabilize their work on a permanent foundation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. 326.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the association of 'proselytism' with *unworthy* motives, derived from Matt. xxiii. 15, is not inherent in the Greek word προσήλυτος, which simply denotes 'one who comes over' to another religion.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. P. Chenchiah, in *Re-Thinking Christianity in India*; 'The Church can hardly help us. Shall we take courage and plunge in the other way, that beckons us to Christ?' (p. 100). Similarly, O. Kandaswamy Chetty, in *I.R.M.* (July 1915), confesses his personal faith in Jesus as 'the one Saviour of the world', and 'the Word of God made flesh'; but says that he has never felt a call to join the Church, or to be baptized (pp. 485 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> J. Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity* (London, 1948), pp. 37, 168 ff.

<sup>5</sup> C. T. Craig, Amsterdam Series, vol. I, p. 41. The writers of *Re-Thinking Christianity in India* would not all agree even to this. See chs. I, IV, V, by G. V. Job, P. Chenchiah and V. Chakkari.

<sup>6</sup> See the Tambaram Reports, vol. II, or the article by N. Macnicol and P. O. Phillip, on 'The Church of Christ in India', in *The Christian Task in India* (London, 1929), pp. 240-54.

Nevertheless, there is little sign that at present, either these practical considerations, or the revived doctrinal emphasis on 'the Church' among Christians is creating much impression on the non-Christian world. This is largely because today the non-Christian finds himself everywhere confronted by a bewildering variety of Christian bodies, most of which obviously regard each other as rivals, rather than as allies in a common cause, and many of which refuse even to worship God together. Each of them urges the convert to 'join the Church'; but if he asks which body really is 'the Church', he is met by a babel of contradictory replies. What wonder if in many cases he turns a deaf ear to all their appeals?

The remedy for this lies ultimately in the recovery of the visible unity of the Church. But meanwhile, we need to recognize clearly that our present sectional Churches have not the right to speak with the full authority of the Body of Christ. This brings us back to the question: should the Christian missionary insist that in all cases, a non-Christian who desires to become a disciple of Christ must leave his ancestral religious community and join one or other of the existing organized Christian Churches?

In the great majority of cases, it is evident that a strong case can certainly be made out for the desirability of 'joining the Church' and making a public confession of this, in Baptism. For a solitary Christian life, lived in the midst of non-Christian society, can rarely be adequately sustained, apart from relationships with fellow-believers, as well as with God.

The general rule, therefore, is clear enough. For his own sake, and for the Church's sake, the convert should join the Church. But can there be no exceptions to this rule? For instance, if the convert is a member of a non-Christian community which allows him liberty of Christian worship and life, and does not demand of him participation in rites which violate his conscience; and supposing that the Christian communities within reach in his neighbourhood are (as is, alas! sometimes the case) obviously living on a lower moral and spiritual level than his own;—are we to insist, even in this case, that he must leave his ancestral religion, and join the Church?

Many will answer, Yes; even then, he must. Some will say this is required for the sake of the contribution which such a convert can make towards the uplift of a degraded Christian community, even at the cost of temporary injury to his own soul. Others will say it is essential for his personal salvation; because the Church, however degraded, is the only covenanted sphere of God's grace, and Baptism is essential for regeneration.

But many Christians are not prepared to identify any existing Church-organization or ordinance with the ideal, or with the Kingdom of God on earth; and these may not feel called upon always to insist on Baptism or Church-membership as an absolute Divine rule to which there can never be an exception. They will endeavour to consider each case on its own merits, bearing in mind both the spiritual welfare of the individual, and the needs and resources of the visible Church on earth. They will be prepared to admit that there may be situations in which a true 'disciple of Christ' *ought* to remain in his old non-Christian community.

The value of 'mass-conversion' is another question about which there are differences of opinion. Some deprecate it, on the ground that it produces large numbers of nominal Christians, who have no personal religious experience or conviction.<sup>1</sup> Others maintain that it is the best (or even the only) way of 'Christianizing' backward communities; and that though the conversions for the most part are bound at first to be only superficial, they can be used as stepping-stones to better things, through the education of the children.<sup>2</sup> Some of us who have had personal contacts with areas where mass-movements have taken place, and have noted how rapidly the first enthusiasm is followed by spiritual decline and even degradation, are inclined to view such movements with some misgiving. At the same time, it must be recognized that we English folk inherit a Christianity which began in our land with 'mass-movements', in which personal conviction played a very small part.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Re-Thinking Missions*, p. 327, etc. Bishop J. W. Pickett, in his *Christian Mass Movements in India*, recognizes the real danger of this, while at the same time believing in the value of mass-movements (pp. 315 f.).

<sup>2</sup> Pickett, *op. cit.* ch. xv.

<sup>3</sup> See Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. II, ch. II, etc.

*The value of the spread of Christian ideals*

Among the supporters of Missions, there are some who would relegate to a secondary place the Church and its Sacraments, and even the necessity of the public profession of a change of faith, maintaining that the all-important consideration is the spread of the Spirit of God's Love as revealed in Christ, through any channel, and under any label.<sup>1</sup> This aim of 'permeation' is, however, decisively rejected by many missionaries, including Dr Kraemer.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly true that unless it is reinforced by faith in a living God who inspires and directs the missionary enterprise as a whole, and guides it into defined channels, it is very liable to evaporate into a vague sentimentality, rather than to generate a dynamic religion.

Some of the advocates of 'permeation' are fond of repeating Mahatma Gandhi's favourite saying that Christians should be content to let the influence of their good lives spread abroad silently, like the aroma of the rose.<sup>3</sup> This contains a useful reminder that, as a missionary influence, the *life lived* is more important than the *words spoken*; and so far, many missionaries will agree.<sup>4</sup> But God has made the rose as part of the vegetable kingdom, to which speech does not appertain; while to man he has given the gift of speech, to be used, and not merely suppressed. If we take Christ as our example, we find that he did not only show us the example of a life completely ruled by God, but he also proclaimed his message by telling words and mighty deeds. It is hardly likely, then, that he would wish his disciples to abstain from the use of that gift of speech which he himself used with such skill and power. If, however, the choice lay simply between the objective of 'permeation' and that of 'conversion' merely in the sense of a change of community or a change of credal profession, then we should agree that the former is the more fundamental.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. C. Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India* (Calcutta, 1933), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Christian Message*, pp. 288-91.

<sup>3</sup> See M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions* (Ahmedabad, 1941), pp. 225 f.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Bishop P. Loyd in *Essays Catholic and Missionary*, p. 315: 'The life the missionary lives counts more than the work he does.'

*The adaptation of Christianity to local conditions*

Few will question the need for some measure of adaptation to local conditions, when the Gospel is presented to non-Christians. No one, for instance, is likely to deny the necessity of translating the message into the language of those to whom it is preached—and translation is in itself an 'adaptation' of the form in which it was originally proclaimed. Further, some adaptation of the externals of religion is generally admitted to be permissible, and even desirable. It is interesting to observe that some of the most adventurous experiments in this direction have been made by missionaries of the Church of Rome, in spite of its rigidity in fundamentals of doctrine and discipline. As examples of this, we may recall De Nobili in India, in the seventeenth century, with his Brahmin caste-mark, and his forged imitation of a Hindu sacred *Veda*;<sup>1</sup> or the Jesuit missionaries in China in the eighteenth century, who tried to obtain Papal sanction for the incorporation of the practice of ancestor-worship into the Church.<sup>2</sup> But all these were 'tactical' moves, not based on the conviction that the things adopted were of any real value, but simply in the hope that they would attract a larger number of converts. There was in them a spirit of compromise, and even of dishonesty; and in the long run, they neither brought nor deserved to bring permanent success.

At the other extreme has been the policy of most of the British, American and Continental Protestant Missions of the nineteenth century, which transplanted their ecclesiastical systems whole and undefiled into Africa and the East. The Anglicans planted in every land the Book of Common Prayer and the 39 Articles; the Lutherans brought from their Churches in Northern Europe and America the stiff ruff to encircle the pastor's neck, and no less stiff dogmas to encircle the mind; the Presbyterians brought the Geneva Gown and the Westminster Confession. In such matters, the 'Home Boards' of missionary societies have generally been more conservative than missionaries in the field.

<sup>1</sup> For De Nobili, see J. S. Chandler, *A History of the Jesuit Missions in Madura* (Madras, 1909). De Nobili was at first supported by the Pope of his day, but in 1723, his 'accommodations' were condemned by the Papal Legate (Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. III, pp. 259 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Latourette, *H.E.C.*, vol. III, pp. 350-3.

All this was natural enough; but it has had the result of making Christianity to appear in the eyes of Africans and Orientals as an essentially foreign religion, which cannot be accepted without a complete breach with their own ancestral traditions—cultural, domestic and religious. On this point, we are in entire agreement with Dr Kraemer, when he says that this 'foreign-ness' of Christianity, as now presented by Western Missions, confronts the Churches in Africa and the East with one of their most crucial problems.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that Christian 'nationals' in these lands are now revolting strongly against what Dr Kraemer calls 'the lack of imagination and of flexibility of mind'<sup>2</sup> which has generally characterized the attitude of the Western Missionary Societies in this matter. This revolt is sometimes taking an extreme form, which would lead to the formation of communal or national Churches, created simply by 'the impulse of the Spirit' in the hearts of their members, with little or no regard to the roots of Christianity in history, or to its development in the world-wide Church.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, in some Oriental and African Churches there has been a movement in favour of dropping the Old Testament, and (in the case of India) replacing it by the Hindu Scriptures as a better *praeparatio evangelica*.<sup>4</sup> But such a policy, however natural, fails to take account of the unique historical relationship between the Old Testament and the message of Jesus Christ.

Yet while there is danger in such experiments, there is no less danger in the conservatism which would resist all attempts to change external forms, however strange or even repellent they may be to peoples of other lands. In theory, Fr. Schmidlin is no doubt right when he says that methods of adaptation should

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Message*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> This tendency is evident in *Re-Thinking Christianity*, and in a more violent form, in 'Ethiopianism' in Africa (see A. Lea, *The Native Separatist Movement in South Africa*).

<sup>4</sup> Some interesting examples of this are given in G. Phillips, *The Old Testament in the World Church* (London, 1942): e.g.,

(a) An Indian Christian (Principal of a College) says: 'I shall drop the Old Testament; this College is Indian; and its right introduction to the sublime truth which Christ reveals is through the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita' (p. 3).

(b) From Africa comes the cry: 'Are our people not sufficiently disposed to polygamy, without your teaching them the O.T. stories of polygamous heroes?' (p. 3).

(c) A Chinese pastor says: 'We don't need Moses and Elijah. It is enough to teach men about God, as Jesus revealed Him' (p. 23).

spring spontaneously from the impulse of indigenous Christians to find their own ways of expressing their religious faith.<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, however, attempts to 'adapt' Christian worship and teaching to Oriental or African conditions have generally been pioneered by foreign missionaries, often against the wishes of the majority of local Christians. It is even more important that they should be undertaken not merely as tactical moves to win converts, but from the higher motive of bringing into the Church something that is of itself of real value; or, it may be, with a view to providing for the Spirit of Christ a more effective channel of expression, which shall be truly 'sacramental'—an outward and visible sign and means of conveying the inward and spiritual grace of God.

*Inter-religious co-operation*

We saw in Lectures iv and v that in the tradition of the Church this has rarely been practised, but that it is advocated to-day by some Christians, and that experiments have been made in this direction.<sup>2</sup> A practical question now confronts many missionaries in the foreign field: Should further experiments be encouraged, or deprecated? (This question will, of course, only arise in mission fields where the indigenous non-Christian religions have risen above the level of primitive barbarism.) Now there are several kinds of inter-religious co-operation; and these call for separate consideration.

(i) *In social service.* In recent years, this has been widely practised, through organizations such as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the International Student Service, the Moral Rearmament Movement, the Council of Christians and Jews, and many others. Sometimes, misgivings have been expressed lest this should lead Christians to lower their own ideals, and perhaps to conclude that after all there is not much difference between themselves and their non-Christian fellow-workers; but generally, co-operation of this kind seems now to be accepted by the authorities of the Church, as legitimate, or even desirable.

<sup>1</sup> See *I.R.M.* (1941), p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 52-6; also D. J. Fleming, *Attitudes towards other Faiths* (New York, 1928), ch. II, 'The Use of other Sacred Scriptures'.

(ii) *In worship.* There are probably few (if any) Christians who would hesitate to ask an individual non-Christian to pray with them privately, so long as they themselves offer the prayer. Most Christians are also willing to invite non-Christians to be present at public worship in a Christian Church, other than the Holy Communion.<sup>1</sup> But only a few are prepared to go further and to join with non-Christians in acts of worship which may be led either by a Christian or by a non-Christian, each after his own accustomed manner. This procedure has, however, been followed at gatherings of the World Congress of Faiths,<sup>2</sup> and at the conferences and retreats of the International and Inter-religious Fellowships in India.<sup>3</sup> Those who advocate it believe that mutual understanding in matters of religion must be based on a sharing of each other's *spiritual* experience in worship, as well as of each other's thought, by means of conference and discussion. What shall we say of this practice?

It is clear that there are some forms of non-Christian worship in which no Christian can take part; such as, for example, rites which involve animal-sacrifice, or the cruder forms of idol-worship. Nor would there be any reality in united acts of worship with those who disbelieve in the existence of any living God who can answer human prayers, or hear human praise.

But unless we hold that no one except a professing Christian can have any real spiritual contact with God, there is no adequate reason to forbid Christians from joining with non-Christians when they pray, and when they practise such forms of worship as are not contrary to Christian principles; expecting that through this co-operation in worship there will come a mutual enrichment of the spiritual life of all who take part.

(iii) *In the search for truth.* In this case, too, our attitude will be determined largely by our theological principles. If we hold that the Christian revelation is so complete that no further truth can be added to it and no fresh illumination thrown upon it from any

<sup>1</sup> In some Missions (e.g. the Oxford Mission to Calcutta), non-Christians are restricted to a separate enclosure at the back of the Church.

<sup>2</sup> See the Reports of the World Congresses, in London 1936, Oxford 1937, and Cambridge 1938.

<sup>3</sup> See the *International Fellowship*, vol. xix, no. 1.

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non-Christian source, then *we*, at least, have nothing to gain for ourselves from discussion with non-Christians. We may, even then, use that method as a means of demonstrating the superiority of the Christian religion, or for discovering the weak points in other religions with a view to destroying them.<sup>1</sup> But if non-Christians realize that this is the real purpose of a Christian invitation to them to 'co-operate' in conference, it is hardly likely that they will respond with great enthusiasm or with open-mindedness. Some Christians would forbid all participation in inter-religious conferences, as more dangerous than profitable. Karl Barth describes the conduct of a missionary who 'fraternizes or accepts the fellowship of those of other faiths' as 'howling with the wolves'.<sup>2</sup>

These misgivings about inter-religious co-operation are often associated with a profound fear of syncretism.<sup>3</sup> But 'syncretism', like 'relativism', is a word that needs careful definition, before we either condemn it or commend it. If by 'syncretism' is meant an attempt to jumble together everything that is found in any existing religion, creating thereby the 'unity' that belongs to a vast jigsaw puzzle—then indeed the effort is futile. On the other hand, if God is One, and God is Truth, then there must be an organic unity between all elements of real truth; and to try and harmonize these (even if it be called 'syncretism') is not inconsistent with Christian Faith.

We conclude, then, that if we accept the view adopted in Lecture v that the Incarnation in Christ is a *distinctive* and *central* (but not necessarily an exhaustive or exclusive) revelation of God,<sup>4</sup> there is no intrinsic objection against co-operation with non-Christians, in both worship and discussion, with the expectation of mutual edification, and with readiness to receive, as well as to give. In that case, neither side will be asked in advance to assent to particular dogmas. Non-Christians will not be expected to

<sup>1</sup> Kraemer regards these as the only legitimate purposes of sharing with other faiths. 'Sharing', with a view to mutual benefit will, he thinks, mean 'the suicide of missions' (*The Christian Message*, p. 299).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Dr N. Macnicol, in the *British Weekly* (30 March 1933), p. 515, from an article by Barth in *Foi et Vie* (November, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> This fear is specially strong on the part of orthodox Protestant theologians and missionaries. See, e.g., Kraemer, *The Christian Message*, pp. 200-11.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 145.

affirm the supremacy of Christ; nor will Christians, on the other hand, be required to assent to the dogma (which non-Christians are sometimes anxious to insist upon) that all religions are equally true. All that is essential is a sincere desire on both sides to find out the truth and to welcome it from any quarter.

To what extent co-operation of this kind has proved itself in practice to be valuable is a question on which opinions differ. Dr Stanley Jones, after a long experience of inter-religious round-table conferences, has come to the conclusion that the distinctive contribution of non-Christians at such conferences is relatively small, compared with that of the Christian members. At the same time, his experience has convinced him that in order to reach a fair appraisal of other faiths, it is essential to meet with their adherents in an atmosphere of friendship and open-mindedness, and to 'sit where they sit', in order to understand their point of view.<sup>1</sup> Dr D. J. Fleming, in his *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths*, while recognizing frankly the difficulties and dangers of such co-operation, gives evidence that many of those who have taken part in it are convinced that it has been of great value to all concerned.<sup>2</sup> It is natural that the measure of mutual spiritual enrichment should vary with the measure of the real religious experience of those taking part; and the evidence is as yet hardly decisive enough to warrant a final pronouncement on the spiritual value of inter-religious co-operation.<sup>3</sup> But further experiments in this direction may lead to more conclusive evidence, and we hold that they deserve encouragement from the leaders of the Church.

#### THE AIM AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Behind all these practical problems of Missions that we have been considering, lies the large question: 'What are Christian Missions really trying, in the long run, to achieve?'

If we were to ask this question of a number of representative missionaries in various parts of the world, or their supporters at

<sup>1</sup> See *The Christ of the Round Table* (London, 1928), pp. 47-61.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* ch. II.

<sup>3</sup> A friend of mine, who has an intimate knowledge of the Moral Rearmament Movement, which now welcomes non-Christians as fellow-workers, without asking them to profess the Christian Faith or to forsake their ancestral religion, considers that so far the Movement has not thereby apparently suffered any loss of its spiritual vitality.

home, we should, I think, receive a large variety of different answers.<sup>1</sup> To begin with, their 'scale of immediate priorities' will vary widely. One will lay his chief stress on 'Evangelism', in the sense of the simple proclamation of the Gospel as widely as possible. With another, the primary aim is to win as many 'converts' as possible from other religions. In other cases, again, the first priority is given to the building up of a strong Christian Church, and the training of its leaders. In a few cases, high importance is attached to the permeation of non-Christian society with Christian ideals, or to the manifestation of the Spirit of Christ through deeds of loving service, without ulterior motives, leaving the results of this in the hands of God.

With regard to the ultimate objective towards which Missions should direct their efforts, there are again differences of opinion among Christians. Some look forward to a time when God's Kingdom will be established on this earth, in the form of a world-wide Church, either by direct succession from the present visible Church, or by some fresh creative act of God. This hope underlies the refrain of Canon Ainger's well-known hymn:

Nearer and nearer draws the time,  
The time that shall surely be,  
When the earth shall be full of the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea!<sup>2</sup>

Others, accepting the verdict of the astronomers, that human life on this planet will eventually cease to exist, look for the fulfilment of God's purpose for men in some other sphere.

The astronomers tell us as a certain fact—Eddington says, *the most certain truth of science*—that the whole universe is steadily and irrevocably running down like a clock. The inevitable end, says Jeans, is annihilation—annihilation of life, of consciousness, of memory, even of the elements of matter itself.<sup>3</sup>

If this is true, it is clear that 'no future development of earthly history can ever be the Kingdom of God on earth.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the essays in *The Missionary Motive*, ed. W. Paton (London, 1913); or those in *Evangelism, as interpreted by Christian Leaders* (ed. John R. Mott, New York, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> *English Hymnal*, no. 548.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. Inge, *God and the Astronomers* (London, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop F. R. Barry, *The Recovery of Man* (London, 1948), p. 108.

These aims and ideals are not in all cases mutually exclusive. But much depends upon the relative importance which we attach to one or another of them. Can we discern, behind all these, some ultimate goal or objective for Missions, evident in the message of Jesus Christ himself, that will enable us to relate all secondary objectives to this and to assign 'priorities' accordingly?

We believe that the answer to that question is suggested in the Gospels. There we read that Jesus began his public ministry with the proclamation: 'The Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent, and believe the Good News!'<sup>1</sup> and further, that he taught his disciples to look for the essence of this Kingdom, not in any fixed organization or creed, but in the Rule or Reign of God, who is Love, in the hearts of men and in human society.<sup>2</sup> This proclamation of the Kingdom rests upon the faith that:

(i) God is willing, here and now, to establish his Reign over human life; but only on condition that men 'repent' (i.e. change their present selfish way of life), and open their hearts to the influence of his Spirit.

(ii) This 'availability' of the Kingdom was proclaimed in Jesus Christ, not only by his words, but also by his Life, Death, and Resurrection, in which we see God himself operative.

Now if this was the faith of Jesus, and is the faith of his Church, the first 'priority' in missionary work will be to show forth the Love of God as effectively ruling, in both personal and social life, and thereby to prepare the way for its final triumph in 'the Reign of God'. If this is kept steadily in view, as the central and ultimate aim of Missions, other aims will fall into their rightful places in relation to this. Some arguments, now frequently put forward, will no longer appear finally decisive. How often we hear some proposal for reform turned down at once, on the plea: 'Oh, but this would damage *our* Mission!', or 'It would weaken enthusiasm for Missions at home!', or 'It would lower the prestige of our Church!' These are important considerations; but they are not finally decisive. Behind them lies the deeper (and more difficult) question: 'Will they promote or hinder the Reign of God, and the coming of his Kingdom?'

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 78-80.

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The same consideration must, I think, be final when we face the question whether an individual convert ought to join a particular Church. Here too, the decisive question will be, in each case: What will best help to establish the rule of God in the heart of the convert and in the community to which he belongs?

The final establishment of the Kingdom of God is a central and essential part of the Christian Faith. But we do not yet know the method by which God will do this. It may be by unbroken development from the Church as we know it, and from the missionary enterprise as we envisage it. But it may also be that God has other plans—to create the Kingdom through the 'death' of our present Church organizations, or through the 'failure' of Missions as we conceive of them. It may be that the realization of the Kingdom will be in some non-earthly sphere beyond our knowledge.

This does not mean that we can slacken our missionary efforts, or regard the Church on earth with indifference. For in the first place, it is on this earth that God has set us to work, and the teaching of Jesus clearly affirms that neglect of the 'stewardship' entrusted to us here will inevitably lead in the end to our own judgment and condemnation.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he also clearly taught that there is a vital connection between the 'things of time' and the 'things of eternity'—not necessarily a connection manifest in continuous and visible growth, but a connection as mysterious (and as vital) as the connection between the seed which apparently dies, and the harvest which springs from its 'death'.<sup>2</sup> We cannot, it is true, of ourselves create the Reign of God; but we can prepare for it, and if we neglect this, we shall have 'to give an account of our stewardship'.

### CONCLUSION

We have come to the end of our course. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? A brief recapitulation may be useful, before we close.

(i) Our primary concern has been with the Christian attitude to

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the Parables of the Talents and of the Pounds.

<sup>2</sup> Mark iv. 27; John xii. 24; I Cor. xv. 35-8.

other religions, and the principles that should govern this; and secondarily with some of the practical consequences that follow immediately from it.

(2) In the course of our study, we have found nothing to disprove, and much to confirm, the faith (with which we began) that through Jesus Christ, God has given a revelation of truth that is central, distinctive, supreme and satisfying for all mankind.

(3) We do not consider that the Christian attitude excludes the possibility that God may also have truly spoken to men through other channels; and we are ready to examine all evidence adduced in favour of (or against) this, without fear or prejudice.

(4) We consider that if we try to test all religions by the principles of Jesus Christ's teaching, it becomes clear that it is quite impossible to maintain that they are all fundamentally alike, or of equal value.

(5) We hold that a Christian, while recognizing the reality of the differences between religions, may rightly take part in inter-religious gatherings and discussions, especially if held in an atmosphere of prayer and worship; believing that since there is in men of all races and creeds something of God's mind and spirit, those who seek the truth in sincerity will be led by him into fuller light.

(6) In determining an 'attitude', the fundamental spirit is all-important; the particular manifestations of it may vary according to external circumstances.

In closing, may I leave with you two quotations, each of which, in its own way, seems to me to strike a key-note of the right Christian attitude to all the problems of life. The first is a careful, 'official' pronouncement, put forth some thirty years ago by a Council of Fathers of the Church. Its immediate reference was to the right attitude which separated *Christian* bodies should adopt towards each other, in order to recover the visible unity of Christendom; and its episcopal authors would probably have demurred at any suggestion that it should be applied to inter-religious relationships. Nevertheless, in that 'Appeal to all Christian People' by the Lambeth Fathers of the Anglican Communion

in 1920, we find, I think, a spirit and an attitude which is fully relevant to the subject of these lectures—an attitude which, while it does not debar criticism, or even condemnation when called for, lays its main stress on the need for fair-mindedness, sympathy, and appreciation. For this is how they describe their vision of 'The Great Church' of the future:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church genuinely Catholic, loyal to all truth, . . . within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common. . . . It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled. . . . This means an adventure of goodwill, and still more of faith; for nothing less is required than a new discovery of the creative resources of God.<sup>1</sup>

The second quotation is from an individual Christian of our own day, who has combined in himself in a unique way the genius of the artist, the audacity of the heretic, the heroism of the pioneer-missionary, and the devotion of the saint—Albert Schweitzer, musician of Alsace and medical missionary of tropical Africa. In his autobiography<sup>2</sup> he gives expression to three convictions which, no less than those of the Lambeth Fathers, lie at the heart of a Christian attitude to other religions. These are: first, the duty of absolute loyalty to Truth, as far as we can apprehend it; secondly, the conviction that it is in Jesus Christ that we find the deepest truth about God and man; and thirdly, devotion to the Christian Church—not necessarily, however, to its forms of words or worship, but to the Spirit of Christ which has been given to us through the Church, as his Body. Here are the words of Schweitzer:

Truth is under all circumstances more valuable than non-truth. . . . Even if it comes in a guise which piety finds strange, and at first makes difficulties for her, the final result can never mean injury; it can only mean greater depth.

Our conviction is that it [the Kingdom of God] can only come into existence by the power of the Spirit of Jesus working in our hearts and in the world. . . . Anyone who ventures to look the historical Jesus

<sup>1</sup> *The Appeal*, §§ 4 and 5.

<sup>2</sup> A. Schweitzer, *My Life and Thought* (Eng. trans., by C. T. Campion, London, 1933), pp. 65, 68, 71, 74.

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straight in the face, and to listen for what He may have to teach him, . . . learns to know Him as One who claims authority over him.

We hold fast to the Church, with love and reverence and thankfulness. But we belong to her as men who appeal to the saying of St Paul: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.'

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